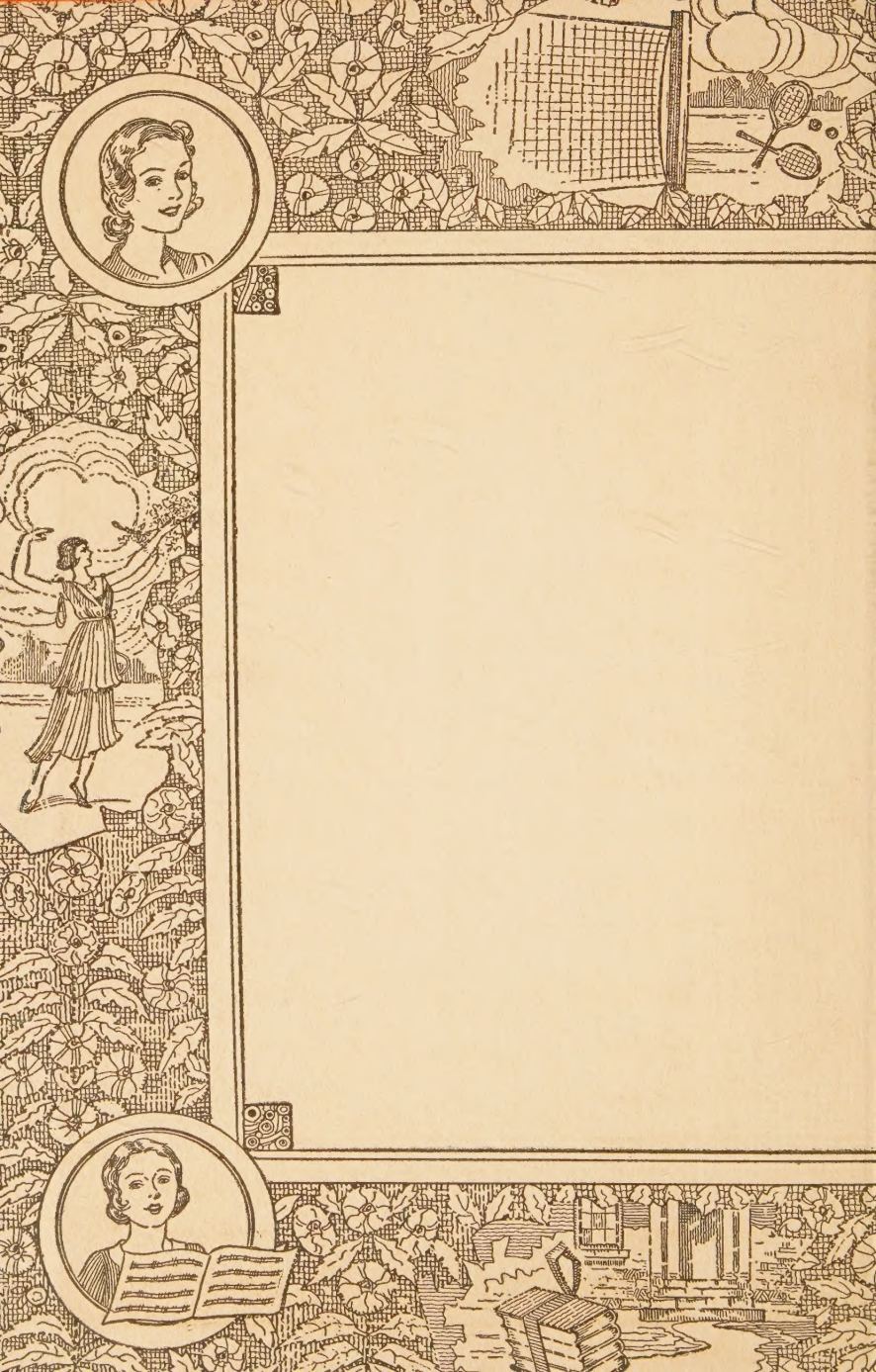
The Girl in the Top Flat

MAY HOLLIS BARTON



LMN
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This is my Book

Emily Soynes.

FROM Aunt Helen

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The Girl in the Top Flat

OR

The Daughter of an Artist

BY

MAY HOLLIS BARTON

Author of "Kate Martin's Problem," "The Girls of Lighthouse Island," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
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Books for Girls

By MAY HOLLIS BARTON

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THE GIRL FROM THE COUNTRY
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TWO GIRLS AND A MYSTERY
THE GIRLS OF LIGHTHOUSE ISLAND
KATE MARTIN'S PROBLEM
THE GIRL IN THE TOP FLAT
THE SEARCH FOR PEGGY ANN

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THE GIRL IN THE TOP FLAT

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The Girl in the Top Flat

CHAPTER I

HIGH HOPES

ALLIE DUNHAM bounded up the long flight of stairs two at a time and swung around the curve at the top. There was a thud, and she stooped to pick up the top of the newel post which she had knocked to the floor.

"Shall I ever remember to be careful of that?" she scolded. "I ought to know by this time that it's wobbly."

Always in a rush to get to places, Allie had been especially interested in reaching the second floor, for in the studio at the end of the hall she would find her father.

Yes, there he was with his back to the north light, paint brush in hand and head slightly cocked to one side. At her entrance he quickly looked up.

"We had the grandest hike, Dad!" the girl said, rushing over and impulsively throwing her arm

about his neck. "Our civics class was gone the whole afternoon. We had a wonderful time!"

"Where did you go?" the artist asked, laying down his brush.

"We walked all the way to the Blue Creek Road," Allie answered, her eyes still sparkling at the memory.

"To the Blue Creek Road? Yes," he agreed, "that is pretty far. Come to think, the school hikes are almost over, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are, Dad. I just can't imagine that the year is so nearly gone. Why, just think, in two weeks it'll all be over."

"That means my little girl has finished her first year of high school," the artist said proudly. He always spoke that way of the girl's accomplishments, if the feat performed were no more than the patching of an apron.

Depositing the box she was carrying, Allie perched herself on a stool at her father's feet.

"How is the painting doing to-day, Dad?" she asked, glancing at the canvas. "That's the one you were doing yesterday, isn't it?"

A shade swept over the artist's face, but in a minute it was gone.

"No, it's the same idea; but I started all over this morning. I can't make it look right." Again came the smile of endearment, but Allie had seen the fleeting shadow which it replaced.

"Dad, tell me what's the matter!" exclaimed his daughter passionately. "Is your wrist bothering you again?"

"Oh yes, it gets a little stiff at times," he said, with a half smile.

"You know, every time I think of that," Allie rushed on, "I get simply furious at myself. I can still see everything—first Mr. Thorndike coming to take you for the ride—then I going up and getting your coat—then all three of us walking out to the car, you getting in, and me slamming the door of the car after you, and——"

"Allie, if you don't stop talking like that, I'm going to take you right across my knee. You know very well that the door was defective. It would have failed to latch tightly for anyone."

"But if I had only——" she persisted.

"Not another word," Mr. Dunham interrupted. "If you must rehearse it, I'll do the rehearsing." At this point he coughed and assumed a grandiloquent manner. "The machine at deadly speed approached a sharp and dangerous curve. It gave a sudden swerve to the left, the door on the opposite side flung open, and the occupant of the front seat, with arms outstretched, was hurled to the pavement."

"What a wonderful actor you'd make, Dad," the girl exclaimed, in admiration. "Thank good-

ness, the machine wasn't going at deadly speed and that it wasn't a sharp curve——"

"Or I might not have been here now," Mr. Dunham finished.

It was indeed fortunate that the artist had fallen in such a position as to land on his wrist, for in this way he prevented the possibility of injury to an organ less capable of regaining its strength. His wrist, however, was still a source of worry. Some weeks after the accident, at a time when he thought it should be almost well, it again began to swell.

"Oh, I can't bear to hear you say that," Allie pleaded.

It was no wonder that the girl could not bear the thought. Just five years before, Mrs. Dunham had been stricken with pneumonia. There had been days of anxiety, then finally the crisis had come and with it her life had ebbed away.

Since that time Allie and her father, without anyone else, had lived together in the old Dunham home in Groverbury, the girl attending the public school in the town, her father earning a living by his art work.

Frequently Mr. Dunham had spoken of hiring a woman to help them with the housework, but nothing had ever been done about it.

"I know it's too much for you, Allie," her father had said more than once. "But I do hope

to get my painting on a more reliable basis before long, and when I do, we'll get someone to help you."

But through these five years the girl had struggled to keep the house looking well, finding that her school work, together with household duties, was a great drain on her strength.

Many times, too, Mr. Dunham had contemplated leaving Groverbury and moving to a city where there would be a larger field for the sale of his paintings. But in the end, the natural dislike for change had overcome the desire for progress, with the result that the old Dunham home was still their abode.

It was a large rambling, shingle house such as was built fifty years ago in many parts of the Middle West. Paul Dunham's grandfather, having established a successful grocery business, had spared no expense in erecting the structure.

Not only the house, but the grocery business as well, had been part of Paul's inheritance, and it was no secret that the business had been, to the artist, a source of great annoyance.

Having finished his course in art at an eastern school, Paul Dunham had returned to Groverbury, eager to devote his life to painting. But his father had disagreed.

"I want you to settle down to business now and carry on the work," the elder Dunham had said.

Paul, his artistic temperament aroused, had expressed his dislike for the grocery business.

"Why, I simply can't, father," he had insisted. "I care nothing about business and my whole soul is wrapped up in art. That's the only thing I really want to do."

"Fiddlesticks! The only thing you want to do! Once and for all, Paul, you have got to carry on the Dunham Grocery Company! Your grandfather started it, I have built it into a big, paying business, and now it's up to you to see it through. You must do it!"

And so Paul Dunham had carried on the business much against his will. He had lasted in it just two years, then his father had died. Nothing now stood in his way, so he sold the business and devoted his whole time to painting, settling in the old Dunham home with his young bride.

For some minutes Allie and her father had sat silently looking at the unfinished painting. Many times their perfect understanding was best expressed in silence.

Suddenly Allie glanced at the old grandfather clock in the corner.

"Why, it's time for the postman!" she exclaimed.

In the Dunham family there were two important occasions each day. One was the morning mail delivery, and the other was the afternoon mail

delivery. Ever since the time when the artist had depended for a living on his paintings, there was the possibility that the postman would bring a letter of acceptance for his work, for there were always at least two or three paintings on the way to possible purchasers.

For some unaccountable reason the last year had been a lean one. Time after time the artist's work would be returned, and with each rejection his confidence decreased.

Several weeks before, he had sent out a painting in which he had unusual pride. He felt no doubt but what that one would bring him a large check, as well as recognition.

"We should be receiving that hundred dollar check most any time now," the artist said, after a brief silence. "It's about time it was coming."

After another short lapse of conversation there came from below the sound of a whistle.

"That *is* the postman," Allie exclaimed, flying from the room. "I'll bet it's your check—I just know it is!"

This time the fragile newel post was remembered, and Allie swung herself around the curve holding to the rail of the banister.

The postman had already deposited the mail in the box and was blowing his whistle for the next house. Feverishly the girl scanned the two envelopes. There was an advertisement from some

mail order house, while the other envelope was that of an oil company.

"I guess it will come in the next mail, Dad," the girl said hopefully, as she reëntered the studio. "You don't want this one. It's just a mail order circular," she explained, tossing it to the table. "But here's something from the Tobet Oil Company."

Tearing open the envelope, the artist quickly glanced at the contents of the letter.

"Huh! Want me to buy some more stock!" His voice was colorless.

"Oh, don't worry so much about that, Dad. Besides, it might come out all right. You know, it just might."

The artist looked at the girl intently.

"Allie," he said seriously, "I want you to promise me that you will never dabble in oil. That's where all our trouble started. To think," he continued in a low voice, "that I was stupid enough to trust Jackson Tobet with my money. I might have known that his oil schemes were crooked!"

"I think he's a horrid, horrid man!" Allie exclaimed tempestuously.

If the artist's failure to sell his paintings had been the only financial worry at this time, the Dunham family could still have kept the wolf from the door, for although Mr. Dunham had sold the grocery business, he had, until that pres-

ent year, retained a substantial amount of stock in it, and his income from this stock had paid the bills when the paintings were slow in being sold.

During the previous summer, however, bitter conflicts among the stockholders of the former Dunham Grocery Company had antagonized the artist so much that later, when Jackson Tobet had offered large dividends and future wealth for investment in his oil company, Mr. Dunham had sold his grocery stock and invested his money in oil.

The first few payments of dividends served to enhance the trust of its investors, but after six months the payments stopped, and the financial statements which Jackson Tobet furnished the stockholders showed some evidence of instability. But he had a facile tongue and staved off the pending investigation, promising that it would only be a short time before his field equipment would be working well again.

"I can't imagine what could have possessed me to draw every bit of stock out of the old business," Mr. Dunham said, after some silence. "But it looked like a real chance, at that," he added.

"Just look at all the other men, too," Allie consoled him.

"Yes, many of them invested heavily. Cantwell, I know, put in seven thousand dollars."

"What do you say if we have an early supper

and then go for a long walk this evening?" Allie suggested, interrupting their all too sober conversation. "I'll run down now," she said without waiting for an answer.

"A fine idea," her father agreed.

"But," and Allie shook her forefinger in an ominous manner, "don't dare try to use that wrist of yours again until it's well." She furrowed her brow until she looked quite stern, then she threw him a kiss and was gone.

Paul Dunham glanced from his hand to the painting, then to the open door through which his daughter had disappeared. He smiled rather soberly as he pulled his chair up to the canvas.

"She *is* a bundle of inspiration," he murmured, as he took up his paint brush. "I doubt if I could paint even a tree if it weren't for her."

Meanwhile, gay notes floated up the steps. The tune was not intelligible, but the gaiety was undeniable. There came a few more minutes of bustling activity in the kitchen, then Allie discarded her apron.

"Foist call for dinnah! Dinnah is now being soived!" Allie trotted up and down the hall, singing out for her imaginary passengers. By the time she had made three trips up and down, the artist had reached the bottom of the steps.

After they had finished eating and while Mr.

Dunham read the *Groverbury Banner,* Allie put the kitchen in immaculate condition.

"Which way?" the artist asked, as they descended the steps to start their walk.

"Let's go out by the college," Allie answered.

The afterglow was still high in the western sky, there was freshness in the June air and a cool, sweet smell in the fields. They walked out toward the country, deep in conversation about a great variety of subjects. Both being nature lovers, each new sign of summer was the basis of comment. But occasionally, Allie, without thinking, would speak of their financial troubles.

She realized that her father disliked worrying about the lack of money, but this fact did not make the condition any less disturbing.

They walked into the country almost two miles before they turned back. The afterglow had faded from the sky above when they turned, and only on the far western horizon could be seen a pink shade against the white clouds.

"Oh, let's not worry any more, Dad; maybe the check for that picture will come to-morrow." Allie Dunham could always add some consoling remark which seemed to ease the tension the artist felt.

"Yes—and maybe it won't," he remarked.

"Oh, but I *know* it will this time," the girl insisted confidently, "and" she added very soberly,

"I think it's going to be a real fat check that will tide us over nicely."

"It's about time," was all he said.

They were soon but a short distance from home. Although they walked slowly, the time invariably seemed short, and on this occasion, as was usually the case, their trip came to an end before they realized it.

When they came to within a few doors of their house, the artist stopped suddenly, catching the girl by the arm.

"What's that?" he muttered hoarsely.

Allie quickly peered in the direction he was staring.

There, crouched on the doorstep of the Dunham home, was the form of a man dressed in tan. The large elm tree threw a weird shadow across the porch, allowing the girl and her father only a vague impression of this ghostly outline.

They stood for a few moments staring in uneasy fashion at the eerie form. With each movement of the swaying elm, the outline of the apparition, to their mind, became less certain. Now it seemed to be crouching, now a short man leaning against the door-frame, now a tall man sitting on the porch. But without a doubt, he was dressed in tan.

"That can't be a sane person," the artist re-

marked. "When a person sits down, he sits on the steps, not back on the porch."

"Oh, don't go up—please!" Allie cried in a terrified voice, as her father moved slowly forward. With strong arms she pulled him back.

At that moment, before he succeeded in drawing his arm away from the frightened girl, an automobile turned the corner, throwing its lights swiftly across the porch.

"It's nobody at all!" Allie exclaimed. "It's your picture!"

But the girl's relief from her fear was quickly changed to sympathy for her father. In an instant she realized what the package on the porch would mean to his hopes.

CHAPTER II

A DECISION

"I'm sorry, Dad," the girl said, taking his hand in hers. "Those people don't know good pictures when they see them."

The artist said nothing. He merely unlocked the door, stood aside for Allie to enter, then followed her in with the picture under his arm.

Allie Dunham realized only too keenly what the return of his work meant to him. But her father's reaction was not the only thing that worried her in this particular case. The actual need of money was looming before her in large proportions.

"I'm sure that picture will bring a hundred dollars," the artist had said many times. "That is some of my best work."

"Sure?" the girl had teased.

"Sure as your life," he had answered.

Her father's despondency was one thing, but the almost empty cash box was another, and just now a more serious consideration.

It was with a sorely troubled mind that night

that the girl hung her dress over a chair and put on her pajamas.

"O, God," she prayed, "don't bother about my dresses, but please sell Dad's pictures. We need the money for them, oh, so badly!"

As Allie lay in bed trying to sleep, she could hear her father pacing the floor and could smell the cigarette smoke floating across the hall and into her room.

"Poor Dad," she murmured to the pillow. "Now he'll be up half the night worrying. If I could only help him! And if I could only get some money."

The next morning was Saturday, but Allie Dunham arose at her regular time, for there was much to be done. The chirping of birds beside her window brought her to see them, and as she glanced up the avenue, she recognized Mr. Hawkins' long stride as he turned off Main Street to Washington. Since the milk had already been delivered, the appearance of this man could mean only one thing—collection.

Allie quickly slipped into her shoes and hooked her dress, for she must get down to the door to meet him before he rang the bell. If he did not stop next door, he would reach the porch in a minute. Under no circumstances should her father be embarrassed by this unreasonable man. She had always disliked Mr. Hawkins, even be-

fore there was any trouble about the bill, and this aversion she also felt for his son, Harry, who sat three seats back of her at school. Both father and son had small eyes, and many times in class she could feel Harry's little black eyes darting right through her shoulder, in a kind of malignant air.

She turned the knob quietly, adjusted the catch so that it would not lock, and closed the door softly behind her. Then she sat on the steps, hands clasped about her knees, intently watching a gray squirrel sit on its haunches, erect, eating something held with its two front paws.

It was some little time before Mr. Hawkins opened the gate and strode up toward the porch, for he had stopped in the next house on his way. His eyes seemed smaller, if that were possible, Allie thought, and his shoulders appeared more rounded.

"If I can only keep the sound from reaching Dad!" she thought. "He's still broken up about the picture."

"Good morning, Mr. Hawkins," she greeted him, as the milkman came near the steps.

"Good mornin'," he said perfunctorily, while taking a book from his coat pocket.

From past experience Allie Dunham knew that the book was used merely to make him appear authoritative, for he had a reputation for remem-

bering exactly what everyone owed him. Now he turned the pages, and, having reached the proper one, ran his finger down the column.

"Humph!" he grunted after looking down his nose through his low-set glasses. "Isn't it time you were payin' that three months' bill?" This time he peered at the girl over the tops of the glasses, head tilted down and forward, eyes looking upward.

Allie had been all prepared for a storm. But suddenly, as she looked at this tall, bent man, her stored-up anger faded. She had no right to her belligerent attitude; she ought to pay her rightful bill; or, failing that, to furnish adequate explanation. He was only asking for what was due, and that without the fussiness which she always attributed to him.

"We really can't, Mr. Hawkins," the girl replied, getting up and walking down to where he stood on the sidewalk. "Dad hasn't sold his paintings, and—and we just can't—yet."

The man shook his head skeptically.

"It's not right to let it run on longer," he said. But as he raised his eyes from his book he saw the girl's face cloud with mortification as well as anxiety and the smooth brow form into troubled lines.

"As I said," he repeated, "it's not right to let it run longer, but if you can't pay it all, you ought to

pay something, just so I know you mean right."

"But—but——" Allie studied the ground, reflection in the large violet eyes. What this man said was right, but she failed to see how they could possibly spare the money.

"Well," she thought; "when you're so near to having nothing, a couple of dollars can't make much difference."

"If you'll wait a minute, I'll go in and see what I can find."

She knew to the last nickel what she could find. She remembered only too vividly how she had counted the contents of the box the day before. It had been necessary to buy ham and bread for her picnic lunch. Three one-dollar bills were there, and one two-spot.

As she walked through the hall, a board creaked ominously. She heard her father moving things about in the studio. He had no doubt been up for some time. Gingerly she drew from the box the two dollar bill and tiptoed to the front door.

"This is the very most we can spare," Allie said, as she held the bill out to him. Her eyes were eloquent; they spoke sincerity and honesty.

"Well, here's your receipt," the milkman said, after filling in the amount and date. "You can't squeeze juice from a dry orange, I guess." He added this comment with a wry smile, and walked toward the gate.

"He can't be very angry or he would never had said that," Allie thought. Still, she rather resented being called a dry orange.

The girl walked quietly into the house, made coffee in the percolator, and toasted some bread. In these days of frugal meals, there was little opportunity to choose the food one liked. Bacon and eggs as a breakfast ration had many months before been discontinued. As father and daughter realized more potently each day the pinch of poverty, they found they had to do without things which a short time before they had considered necessities.

When the simple breakfast was ready, Allie called her father. He soon appeared at the door, his black wavy hair combed into a pompadour. He had a warm smile for his daughter. It made no difference what his thoughts or feelings were, there was always the morning smile for Allie.

After applying several dashes of butter to a piece of toast, Allie laid it on her plate, put her elbows on the table, and cupped her chin in her hands. As she looked across at her father, the violet eyes sparkled with the brilliance of her new resolution. Only on rare occasions was her attitude so profoundly intent. The last time it had occurred was when she had conceived the idea that the civics class should organize and give a play.

Her father, as usual, had in that been her first confidant.

"I wasn't going to tell you, Dad," she began, in a hesitant manner; "but I had to pay two dollars on our milk bill this morning."

"You don't mean to say that's been running very long unpaid, Allie!" The artist realized that he owed almost all of the merchants, but he failed to understand the extent of his debts. He not only disliked being in business, but he had a passive scorn for details and money. This probably accounted for his haphazard way of keeping track of his financial affairs, and his willingness to let the girl shoulder the burden.

"I had forgotten, too, that it was three months; but now I remember that it has been that long," Allie said.

"You know my picture, 'Spring,' that we liked so well. I can't understand why we don't hear from that. It's certainly been gone long enough." The artist would much rather talk of his prospective earnings than of unpaid debts.

"How much do you think you might get for that, Dad?" the girl asked hopefully.

"It should be seventy-five or a hundred," the artist answered, shaking his head. He realized only too potently that his estimates were always higher than the actual check—if the check came at all.

"What I started to tell you, Dad, is about my plan." Allie was attempting to muster up courage to present it to her father, knowing that he would probably forbid the undertaking.

"You see, there are only a few dollars left for us to run on, and we really need money awfully badly." How stupid that sounded, she thought; as though her father didn't realize it as much as she did!

"Well, I'm going down to see that miserable old Jackson Tobet and—and I'm going to make him give us some dividends on our oil shares. I'm going down this morning."

When Allie Dunham had started talking, it was with the intention of suggesting the trip, or asking if she could go. But as her plan came from her lips she gained confidence, and announced that she would go.

"I think it would be quite useless to do that, Allie," her father remonstrated.

"But, Dad——"

"Don't you know they have been making investigations of his business? The last I heard they had sent for reports from his oil fields, and the lawyers are waiting until they get definite word."

"But that doesn't help our dividends any, does it?" the girl asked reflectively. "What does Mr. Tobet say?"

"Well, he's still keeping his head up, trying to

get more investors. He said that they had a little trouble drilling—struck rock, or something—and there would be some delay."

It was always with a hopeless tone that Mr. Dunham discussed the oil stock. All the eagerness of the early days of investment had disappeared, and now everyone was beginning to become perturbed. Some whispered word had gotten under way in Groverbury, and, like a snowball rolling down hill, it had gathered size. Finally, doubts began to arise, and after they had circulated for some time, they took a definite course and the investigation was started.

"Even if nothing comes of it, Dad," the girl insisted, "I do want to try. You know, he just might pay us something."

"Never saw such a determined youngster in my life," the artist acknowledged. "You can go ahead if you want to."

Allie, making an imaginary piano of the table, danced her fingers over its edge. Then she jumped up from the table.

"I feel almost too important to wash these dishes," she chirped.

The artist went upstairs to work on his picture while Allie cleared away the dishes. It was all very well to make believe it was an adventure while her father was around, but when she thought of the almost empty cash box in the cupboard, it

made her heart ache. It was hard to try to make believe then. She hated even to think what they would do if the morning's enterprise failed. What was there *to* do?

"When that girl's a mind t'work, she kin do things in no time," Mandy had said some years before on her Monday visits, and although the statement might have been slightly exaggerated, it conveyed the spirit of Allie Dunham's activity.

On this particular morning the dishes from breakfast fairly bounded from the dish wiper into the cupboard. In fact, if they had been rubber instead of china, they would have actually bounced into place.

CHAPTER III

MISSING

"WELL, I'm off!" Allie Dunham called to her father in a tone of confidence when she was ready to leave the house.

"Good luck!" he said, as he looked up from his file.

"It's a good thing you're looking up things instead of painting," she said in a sprightly manner, "or I just wouldn't let you go on with it."

When the girl felt in this humor, she would assume an authoritative air, as though her word would be undisputed law. But she knew that as soon as her father found the particular picture he was looking for in his files, he would again be at his painting, completely disregarding his injured wrist.

Her father's file cabinet was a chest of drawers, the contents of which he had accumulated through the years. If he wished to paint a dog in a certain position, he would turn to the D's, run through his pictures of dogs, and select the one which most nearly illustrated his idea.

Allie with the resiliency of manner found only

in a very young, very determined girl, hurried down the steps and swung along the street with her golden, bobbed hair slightly following the direction of the breeze. The breeze came from the west, and since she was walking east, she had to give a quick little toss of her head to keep the truant locks from her eyes. But the wind always stirred up at inopportune times.

Once on Main Street, the girl was so eager to reach her destination and have the unpleasant ordeal over that not even the Women's Apparel Shop could attract her. From the corner of her eye she could see some smart sleeveless dresses, but she walked on without hesitating.

"I don't like that kind," she would often say to herself as she gazed in the window. The remark would be accompanied by a squinted nose, which grimace meant emphasis. But it did not mean truth, for it was only a pleasant way of acknowledging to herself that she could not afford to buy the frocks.

"Wonder what that Palmer building's like," she thought. "I've never been up there before." Groverbury could boast of its new four story building, absolutely fire proof and modern in every respect. Most of the town's professional men were located there, and the rest of the rooms were occupied by business offices of the telephone and

telegraph companies, real estate and other established enterprises.

Besides the more or less permanent organizations, however, there were a few such as the Tobet Oil Company whose residence in Groverbury had been of short duration. To be specific, Jackson Tobet had, only eleven months before, established his office on Main Street, having come there directly from Oklahoma where he had been engaged in the field end of the oil business.

"I know this industry like my inside coat pocket," he was fond of saying, and to the business men his array of facts and figures had appeared sound. "You've got to be mighty careful these days," he would add, as an apparent warning to his prospective investors. "Before you take anybody's word for anything, you've gotta see statistics; you've gotta see statements; you've gotta see the exact standing of the business." He gave each part of the warning with an added emphasis, so that by the termination of his parcel of eloquence, his deep voice roared his message while his right fist banged down on any piece of furniture that was handy.

Groverbury up to this time had been singularly free from tricksters, and although its people were not unduly gullible, they failed to see behind this mask of hale heartiness. They took the man at face value, and after what they thought to be a

thorough and convincing investigation, they were willing to place their money with the hope of large returns.

"Yes, I certainly would like to wring his neck," Allie thought. The very intenseness of the idea routed the radiant confidence from the large violet eyes, and put in its place a blazing fury.

She entered the building, looked around at the white marble walls, and then spied the room directory, large and black, on the side wall by the elevator.

By standing on tiptoe she could run her right forefinger down from the top of the left hand column, but after a second of this activity, she stepped back, slightly self-conscious. This was her first experience in finding offices or in consulting wall directories, and she did not at first realize that the Tobet Oil Company would doubtlessly be listed under the T's, that the large white letters against the black background could be as easily seen several feet away as near by, and that running one's finger down the column was as unnecessary as picking one's teeth after a glass of water.

There it was: Tobet Oil Company—Room 409.

"If I could only be manager of this building," she thought vehemently, "I'd move Jackson Tobet down in one dark corner of the cellar, and then when he kicked I'd tell him the upper floors were only rented to decent people."

"Where is room four hundred nine?" she asked of the elevator operator.

"Two doors to the left," he said sleepily. She was on the verge of inquiring on which floor she should walk two doors to the left, but decided instead that she would try to appear sophisticated and act as though she really had known all along.

The elevator man stopped at the fourth floor and looked around at Allie. She stepped out and turned to the left. First came Room 407. The next must be her destination.

She stood facing the door, and with steeled eyes read the number. As she read the name, however, her eyes grew smaller and her shoulders squarer. She reached out her hand toward the knob, intending to burst right in and make her demand. But as she extended her hand, that very physical effort, now since she was so near, made her draw back instinctively, and before she herself realized it, she had taken several steps backward.

"Goodness, I hate to go in!" she said half aloud. Much of her bravery disappeared on the scene of action.

At that moment she heard the clanging of the elevator door shutting on a lower floor, and rather than be caught hesitating before the office, she walked quickly down the hall.

Standing by the open window a short distance away from the Tobet office, she gazed down on

the side street, watching the steady stream of cars pour out of Main Street. Then there came the rattle of opening doors, and from the corner of her eye she observed two men step from the elevator.

They started in her direction, but at Number 409 they turned the knob and disappeared within the room.

"It's just as well that I let them go in first," she decided, attempting to justify her hesitancy. "Now I'll have time to fix up exactly what I want to say."

Both at home and on the walk down that morning, Allie Dunham had resolved on at least a dozen different ways of making her demand. Each one of them, though, was discarded as lacking in force. Now, when she had to make up her mind, she settled the question by saying:

"Oh, well, I'll say whatever seems natural at the time."

She doubted very much that Jackson Tobet understood decent language, anyway.

While she was reaching these conclusions, she heard at the same time the opening of a door and sudden loud voices. Quickly she turned about.

"That embezzler! We'll get him! Leave town, did he? Well, he won't stay away very long! The rascal! The dirty scoundrel!"

The larger man with a gray suit who now

emerged from the door grew very red in the face, and, with each epithet, he spluttered more and more. The pale little man by his side wore an expression of bitterness, but he said nothing. The compressed lips and narrowed eyes, however, took the place of words.

"If he thinks he can get away with that," the tall fellow muttered, "he's doing some bum figuring. No faker is walking away with almost ten thousand dollars of my hard-earned money. No s-i-r!" He gritted his teeth and trilled the R-R as though the vibration might carry through the air and apprehend the absconder.

Only the sound of the clicking elevator door jarred the dazed girl into consciousness. She stood watching and listening with wide eyes and parted lips, oblivious of everything but the meaning of the words.

"Embezzler!" "Leave town!" The words still rang through her brain with unceasing regularity like the beating of the metronome that stood on top of her piano. She could hardly change her position, except to lean more heavily against the window sill in order to get some support, some help. Her mind and body stood still; they could not work together, and each refused to function alone.

Finally Allie rubbed her handkerchief across her dampened brow, and this, giving her strength,

prompted the next move. She clinched her teeth, marched down the hall, and opened the door of the Tobet office.

On the other side of the room, bending over a desk, was a tall, dark-haired girl.

"Tell me—what does this all mean? Where is Jackson Tobet?" Allie's words came gushing forth with sudden released fury. She scarcely knew if they made sense or if they hung together.

The girl straightened up and Allie saw a troubled look, a forlorn expression. This was no accomplice, no conspirator.

"I wish I knew," the office girl said. "He's been gone two days now, and my pay is long overdue."

"But the money!" Allie demanded. "The money! Where is it?"

"Don't ask me about the money again, or I'll scream!" the girl retorted, her hopeless look giving way to anger. "I've been hounded and hounded by half of Groverbury, and all I'm staying here for is to see if there isn't some chance to get my salary."

Allie immediately understood the girl's innocence, but the suddenness of this thing was too much. Questions formed themselves and burst from her lips. They came out accusing, demanding, like a series of explosions, but, despite the outbreak, the flame of anger had passed. Now

covering the whole situation was a screen of fog. Could it be possible that Jackson Tobet had disappeared with the finances of the whole company?

"The federal accountants were coming around Monday," the girl was saying. "Some way or other Mr. Tobet heard about it. Now they find that he checked out of the hotel Thursday night late. They said he drew his money from the bank Thursday afternoon just before it closed."

Allie Dunham turned slowly and walked to the door. The air was hot, and the world was dark. She did not feel tied up inside this time. She felt heavy, like lead, almost inert, felt she would crumple in a heap or collapse like a rubber doll when the air is let out.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

THE minute Allie Dunham stepped through the entrance of the drug store, there was Razoo dancing up to her, barking hilariously and sending out tender little dog kisses with each bark.

"You old dear!" Allie exclaimed. "I don't know what I'd do if I couldn't come down and see you every now and then." This sentiment pleased Razoo greatly, and his tail beat the air just twice as fast. Only six months before, the Dunhams finding they were no longer able to feed the dog, had given him to the druggist.

"Anything I can do for you this morning, Miss Sunshine?" inquired the young druggist from back of the candy counter.

"I was going to buy an ice-cream cone for Razoo and me," she answered glibly. "But he tells me now he doesn't want any. Better hold him while I go out—he'll want to see me home."

Down Main Street and up Washington Allie walked, her pink gingham skirt blowing in the breeze. Seeing Razoo had painted a tiny bright spot on an otherwise dark horizon. But her

spirits were not to be raised by any such pleasantries.

Allie, after her mad pace up the street and her veritable gallop up the steps, reached her father's door, her forehead resembling little waterfalls. It took very little to bring a flush to her clear cheeks, and now her coloring was graduated from a deep pink to actual red spots on her cheeks. The violet eyes, too, were flashing.

She had raced up the steps, expecting to burst forth with the whole cruel story. But when she saw her father sitting there so calmly, paint brush in hand, words failed her.

"Tobet's gone, Dad," she said simply.

The artist looked at Allie, full understanding coming slowly into the brown eyes.

"Gone! You mean he's run away?" he gasped. His right hand went in quick, nervous fashion over his pompadour, as was his custom when excited. "Do you mean he's absconded with the money? Allie, girl, talk fast! When did he go? Where did you find out? Tell me everything!"

In broken sentences Allie spluttered the story as she had discovered it.

"Who were the men you saw?"

"They were those two new officials at the bank —the First National—I think. I don't know who else they could have been."

"Then he got them, too," the artist muttered.

"But Allie, Allie," he cried in an agonized voice, "this means our money is all gone!"

The girl's emotion reached too near the crying point to allow her to express herself. Twice she opened her mouth and tried to speak, but each time her mouth was dry and the words gone. She placed a comforting arm about her father's shoulder.

"But we're just going to live on and be brave, Dad, aren't we?" she said at last. She had read something like that in a story, and it floated into her mind now.

"Yes, you're right, my dear," he answered in a low tone. "We've got to live on—carry on. That's the code."

Allie smiled tenderly. That was her brave father talking again. Carry on—carry on—no matter how hard it was—keep your head in the air when you wanted to burst out crying, when all you could do was keep your lips from quivering, when you wanted to cry out to the world for help, when you felt you could not go on further. But no, you would carry on! That was the code!

"I must find out about this," the artist said, as he walked over to the phone.

Calling police headquarters, he learned that Jackson Tobet's description had been broadcast at eleven o'clock the evening before, that the po-

lice in the neighboring towns and cities were notified, and that detectives were on his trail.

From the railroad station the police learned that a man answering Tobet's description had bought a ticket for St. Louis on the midnight train Thursday.

"He must have gone west to St. Louis to throw us off the track, and then have taken the train for New York or some place in the East," Mr. Maloy, the sergeant, said, and Mr. Maloy's word was not to be taken lightly, for he had come to Groverbury direct from a responsible position in New York City where his health would not permit him to remain.

"Didn't he leave anything in his account at all?" Mr. Dunham asked, as though there might be some small hope of his return.

"No, sir!" came the answer over the wire. "He must have had it all planned beforehand. He had been drawing on his account slowly for some time, so as not to arouse suspicions—said he was buying more drills in the East for his oil wells."

"Is there anything that can be done about the losses?" the artist asked, still holding out for some word of hope.

"Couldn't say as yet," the sergeant replied. "Guess they'll be holding meetings about it next

week. I'm mighty sorry for you fellows, Mr. Dunham."

The artist turned from the phone and walked to the window. Not for a long time had Allie seen her father so deeply moved. But she felt utterly powerless. Never had she so wanted to help, and never had she felt so useless.

"I'm going to run down to the shop and get something to eat for lunch, Dad," Allie said, starting from the room. She did not wait to see if there would be an answer.

On entering the butcher shop, Allie felt that Mr. Zeltmann looked at her rather sharply. He had been giving the Dunhams credit for the last several months without any payment at all. Of late he had made some pointed remarks. In fact, once he had said he would have to discontinue their credit.

"You know I can't live on promises, either," he would say in his half kindly, yet determined manner. "You can't expect to go on forever like this."

"But father hasn't sold his pictures," she would explain, hoping that this would suffice. She grew so terribly tired of telling people that her father could not sell his pictures. She hated making excuses for him.

"Now Allie," Mr. Zeltmann said as she asked for twenty-five cents' worth of hamburger steak,

"I like you and I like your father, but that doesn't help me pay my bills. Unless you can pay part of that bill, I can't let you have credit any more."

So the end had come!

The girl attempted to reason with him, to remind him that after all, it would be only a short time before they could pay everything. But her talk was in vain. She finally walked from the store, dazed. Now surely had come the end of things. All along, she had trusted that something would happen, but now they seemed to have reached the end of the rope, to be dangling, holding with one hand, and slipping, fast slipping down over a precipice.

Tears came, and she walked swiftly around to the back of the house and sat on the grass at the foot of their huge apple tree. Her confidence was exhausted, and she could think of nothing to do. There was no way to get any money. Always just ahead was that hope that a picture would be accepted, that payment would come. But that hope would not buy food for the morrow. And what they needed was food for to-day, for that very next meal!

CHAPTER V

MANNA FROM HEAVEN

SUDDENLY Allie Dunham looked up and jumped to her feet. She had heard her name called, in a soft, sweet voice.

"Oh, there you are!" called Mrs. Ames from the other side of the wire fence as Allie hurried toward her.

The girl was trying to smile, but it was hard to get the wrinkles in the right place when her mouth puckered and quivered and when her eyes drew up tight with tears. Fortunately, the tree under which she had been sitting was in the lower part of the yard on the opposite side from the Ames house, so that by the time the girl reached the fence no tears were visible, and the smile which had been coaxed so hard had finally appeared.

"I couldn't resist bringing you a bite of this roast," Mrs. Ames said, holding out toward the girl a large platter covered with a napkin. "We were expecting guests from out of town to-day, and just received a telegram that they can't come."

The girl was radiant as she reached her hands toward the platter.

"Oh, Mrs. Ames——"

"Now, dear," the woman interrupted, seeing the girl's confusion, "don't thank me. It's nothing. I just thought you might enjoy it."

Before Allie could say another word she saw her neighbor's little white apron strings flying out back of her as she hurried up the steps. For a few seconds the girl was unable to move. She merely stood holding the platter in her outstretched hands, rooted to the spot.

"I can hardly believe it," Allie muttered, as she finally turned toward the house. "I will never, never give up hope again, no matter what happens."

As a matter of fact, Allie Dunham very rarely gave up hope. Being trained in her early youth to help manage the house, she had become stronger and more reliable than many older girls who had grown up with less responsibility. It was only at times when she felt she was driven against a wall that she would allow the first tear to come, and, of course, after the first, there would always be a deluge.

"Mrs. Ames is such a peach," Allie thought, as she walked toward the house. "Here she didn't ask me what was the matter or anything. She knew I wouldn't want her to know I was crying."

Allie hurried about the kitchen, setting the table, making tea, and cutting the bread. Every-

thing else for the lunch was on the platter—wonderfully savory slices of roast beef, generous portions of mashed potatoes, carrots, and string beans.

"Oh, Dad!" she called, after she had arranged the meal, "come quick. I have a surprise for you."

There were no traces of tears now, and the sorrow following her visit to the butcher had entirely disappeared. Fortunately, crying did not disfigure Allie's face for long. After a dash of cold water most of the ugly red was gone.

The artist looked long and wonderingly at the table, while the girl with a teasing smile said never a word.

"Did it just fall from the heavens, Allie?" he finally asked.

"It must have, Dad," the girl answered, laughing. "Mrs. Ames caught it for us and handed it over the fence."

"Awfully nice of her," he commented.

After the first few pleasantries they ate in silence, for both their hearts were heavy with worry. Although nothing was mentioned about stretching the food, they both ate sparingly of it, and when they arose from the table there was still enough left for the evening meal.

That afternoon Allie sat reading *The Lady of the Lake* on which she was to be examined the following Monday. Across the room her father

was looking through his file. Presently the girl heard the drawer slam shut, and, on looking around, saw her father's pale face tense with anger. It was very seldom that she saw him like this, and his appearance frightened her.

"Dad!" she exclaimed, dropping her book and rushing toward him. "Please don't get so angry!"

Then she saw the cause of his emotion. In his right hand he clasped the oil certificates which Jackson Tobet had given him in return for his money.

"What a fool I was!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "I'm going to tear up these papers so I'll never have to see them again!"

Allie quickly snatched them from him.

"Oh, you mustn't," she besought him.

The artist made a motion as though to recover the certificates, as the color now rushed to his face.

"Give them here!" he said irritably. But the next minute his rage had abated somewhat and he said no more.

"I'll put them away," Allie said, as she walked toward the door. "I don't blame you for not wanting to see them."

She hid them in the bottom of her own bureau drawer, first carefully placing them in an envelope.

"They might be good some time," she thought. Her womanly intuition had prompted her act.

When she had reached out to take the papers, there had been no time to think. "I hope he isn't angry with me for doing it," she murmured.

Many times of late the girl had been forced to act on her own initiative. Her father was such a dear and so kind, but she had long before realized his utter disregard of money matters. Slowly, because of necessity, the girl had developed the ability to take charge of things without waiting for someone to tell her.

The next day was indeed a dreary one. The weather was bad, and their meals not much better. Instead of a chicken or roast, which they usually had to celebrate the day, their meals now consisted of food that was already in the house. There was still a quantity of canned goods in the basement.

In the afternoon the sky was still forbidding, but the rain had stopped. The two started for a walk in silence.

"Quick as school's out, do you know what I'm going to do?" Breaking into the silence the girl's voice sounded determined and resolute.

Even for her most demanding questions, Allie rarely awaited an answer. Her method of imparting knowledge was by the question and self-answer type.

"I'm going to get a job," she announced with great emphasis.

"You're going to——"

"Oh, now, Dad, don't say I can't," she interrupted, sensing his disapproval before he had an opportunity to express it.

"I'm just dying to see if I can really hold down a job. I've heard the older girls talk about it a lot of times, and I know I could really get one if I tried hard enough. Honestly, I'd be so proud if I could come home at the end of two weeks with a real pay check. I'd feel like—like seven hundred dollars. Please don't say anything against it!"

The violet eyes were widened in the most eloquent supplication, while the tiny teasing smile betrayed her confidence. Many times during these last few months she had thought of the plan, with growing interest but with some agitation lest her father forbid her carrying it out. The episode with the milkman and again with the butcher had, however, determined the girl. She would get work for the summer if it were at all possible.

"Little girl, do you realize that you're only fifteen years old? You're too young even to think of a job. What put that thought into your mind?"

"If you knew how badly I wanted to, Dad," she pleaded. "If you only knew! Why, I'm just dying to do it. I can hardly wait until school is out."

"Where would you go?" Only too keenly did

the artist feel the need, but his pride rebelled at the thought of his young daughter getting work.

"Well, I'd try the millinery shop first of all. I always did think I'd like to sell hats. Then—then—well, I'd just go around to all the stores. It's not as though the business part of town was very far away." Any argument was better than no argument at all, even though it sounded somewhat flat.

"I'd sort of like to work in the drug store, too," she continued, after a moment's silence. "Then I'd get to see Razoo every day. This morning when I went in to see him, he made the biggest fuss over me. It's been a half year now, but I don't think he's forgotten a bit.

"Oh, say yes," she pleaded, noting her father's silence. "Just let me try."

"I hate to have you do it, but it will help until some of my pictures are accepted," the artist said. "It can't be much longer now," he added hopefully.

With her father's consent to find work, Allie experienced a sense of relief.

They walked toward home through town this time, and as they passed the picture show, the crowd was coming out. In order to avoid the rush of people, Allie and her father stepped toward the curb, and in doing so almost ran into a beggar who stood there with outstretched hat.

"Just a dime for a cup of coffee, Mister," he entreated of the artist. "I ain't had nothin' fer——"

Without listening to the rest of the tramp's story, Mr. Dunham said "All right—all right," impatiently and, reaching into his pocket, drew out a dime for the fellow.

As they passed on through the crowd Allie looked up at her father in silence. She knew that it was impossible for her father to deny anyone's request, no matter how little he, himself, possessed.

"If it were our last ten cents," Allie thought, "it would be just the same. And I'm not sure that it isn't the last." But she did not make any comment.

When they reached home, the artist, seeming unusually pensive, walked up to his studio. Later in the evening, as they both sat reading, her father looked up from his magazine.

"I suppose I was born feeling sorry for people," he mused, half to himself and half aloud. "That tramp this afternoon probably had more than we have right now."

"He wouldn't have to have much," Allie replied, thinking of the depleted cash box in the kitchen. She could see by one glance that her father was in no humor for bantering, and she was immediately sorry for her remark.

"But, then, he probably hasn't a little girl who loves him very much," she added devotedly.

"If he did he wouldn't be there," the artist said. "He'd have more pride. He'd want to make a real living." As he spoke his hand passed over his hair in the old nervous fashion.

"Oh, Allie," he exclaimed suddenly, in a tone of deep anguish, "what a miserable provider I am! What a wretched failure!"

Allie Dunham's book fell to the floor and within a second she was sitting on the arm of his chair with her arm about her father.

"What an adorable father you are, you mean," she reproved him. "Please don't say those things, Dad," she pleaded. "It burns right into my heart and makes me feel horrid." But the girl could not go on. Tears came, and not having a handkerchief there, she brushed them away with her sleeve lest they fall on her father's face. He must not know. His emotion was already too deep.

A little later Allie read a short story aloud, and at the end of that the atmosphere was somewhat brighter. But the evening on the whole was a mournful one, and, try as she would, Allie Dunham could do nothing to lighten her father's burden. Indeed, she felt such a heavy one on her own shoulders that it was hard to think of anything else.

The next morning there was a clear sky, and as

Allie walked to school she felt she should really be going into town and finding work that very day. But if they had got along up to this point, surely some way would be found to live on a few weeks longer.

There was to be a meeting of the Civics Club that noon, so she brought with her a few sandwiches so that she might remain there for lunch.

In the evening the girl hurried home, and on reaching her father's studio found him sitting at the window, listlessly watching the street below.

"I can't understand why I don't hear from that painting, 'Spring'," he said. "Goodness knows it's been gone long enough."

Just as he finished the sentence, the sound of the postman's whistle reached them. As usual, Allie lived on expectations and hopes.

"Can't you just know that something has come now?" she asked. "Can't you just feel it?" After so many demonstrations of the girl's enthusiasm, followed by such frequent disappointments, the artist no longer responded. He smiled faintly, however, as she bounded from the room.

This time Allie actually did knock down the top of the newel post, but nothing could have stopped her. She met the postman on the steps and to her inexpressible disappointment was given a postal card whose large lettering advertised a magazine.

Sorrowfully, she turned to retrace her steps after saying "thank you" in a rather dejected manner. Could this go on forever? The girl was so tired of expecting things—futilely, always futilely. She felt she could stand it no longer!

When she was half way up the steps, she was surprised to hear the door bell ring. She had seen no one coming. Turning and walking down, she saw through the open door the postman's figure.

"Here's something else for you," he said cheerily, holding out the letter he had overlooked.

With a cry of joy, the girl literally leaped the rest of the way down to the bottom. So tense was her expectation and so eager her wish, she hardly dared look at the envelope.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she exclaimed joyfully, as she read on the envelope the name of an eastern magazine to which her father submitted work.

CHAPTER VI

TEMPORARY RELIEF

As THE girl mounted the steps, terror again seized her heart. What if this were only another rejection? Could her father live through it? Would he be able to face failure after failure?

"Open it—open it—open it!" Allie exclaimed, running her words all together unintelligibly.

Like a drowning man who is thrown a rope, the artist excitedly tore open the envelope. From it he drew a folded letter, then, as he held the envelope up to the light, he uttered an exclamation of joy.

"There's something else, Allie," he cried. "A check, my dear! A check!" His joy made him incoherent. Feverishly he unfolded it, and Allie by his side saw the word *"Fifty."*

Around and around they danced, the girl fairly dragging him in circles. Finally, when her emotion had spent itself, she put her hands on the artist's shoulders, looking at him with beaming eyes.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she exclaimed joyously. "Isn't it simply wonderful?"

Even a stranger could understand how deeply the artist was touched. There was not a smile overspreading his features, but there was a look of peace and sincere thankfulness. To Allie it appeared to be reverence, and what she saw in his eyes made her take his hands and pull him into a kneeling position. Silently they remained in prayer.

How joyous were the next few days! It was such a relief to be able to pay some of their bills. Of course, the fifty dollars would not really go far if they were to attempt to pay them all. They owed so terribly much! Allie hated to look at the memorandum of amounts. It filled her with fear.

In a businesslike manner she apportioned out a small amount on each bill which they owed. They still appeared very large, though. When she had made out a penciled account of what she intended paying, she brought it up to her father.

"My little girl!" he exclaimed in surprise, "how did you ever learn such things?"

"What, Dad?" she asked innocently.

"Such a businesslike way of doing things," he explained. "What a joy to know that you are able to," he added.

"Well, I want them to know we're doing our best, anyway," she replied, making clear her motive.

"Yes, it's the best way," he said.

After a few more days Allie saw the dollar bills in the cash box dwindling down to fewer and fewer. They seemed to melt into thin air, so fast were they used up.

"Well, I must get a job pretty soon," she mused. "I'd be happy if I could find one and start right in as soon as school was over."

A day before, as Allie and her friends had been walking home from school, the subject of vacations had come up. As usual, each one expressed her opinion.

"We're going to leave town the very day after school is out," Amy had said. "We're going down in the Ozarks. It's *so* pretty there!"

Babs was equally enthusiastic about her proposed trip to the country. "Oh, mother and I can hardly wait to get out on the farm," she explained. "We always spend a month with Aunt Marge. She has an *adorable* farm, and the cutest little pigs. You ought to see their little curled tails. I'm just *mad* about the farm," she went on, and would probably have described her whole summer had it not been that the girls had reached her own home, thereby cutting short her enthusiastic description.

"What are you planning, Allie?" Amy asked as the two walked on together.

"Why, I'm going to get a job," Allie answered.

"And I'm going to have a lot of fun trying to find one."

"Oh, that'll be grand," Amy agreed. "I would just love to, but mother won't hear of it. We talked about it the other day, and I simply begged and begged."

"What a shame that you can't," Allie sympathized. "I know it's going to be great fun."

Allie confessed to herself that despite her eagerness to find work, when the other girls talked of their trips to the country and the mountains, her enthusiasm was somewhat dampened. How glorious it must be to have everything done for you and never to have to bother about money. But of course she would never let anyone else know of her feeling.

"I'll buy a post card for you with the first money I make," Allie promised gleefully. "Imagine earning real money! Just imagine!"

The next day was again Saturday, and Allie Dunham planned to make her first campaign for work. She sat beneath the apple tree the afternoon before, looking at the sky.

"I think I'll try the millinery store first," she decided, after running over on her fingers the possibilities. "There's the grocery store. No, they hire only boys. Then the drug store. But they hire boys, too. Maybe I could get in Hancock's

Dry Goods Store, but I'd really much rather sell hats."

The next morning Allie combed her hair carefully and donned her pink gingham dress. It was the one she had made during the winter in the sewing class. Although Allie had never been particularly adept with the needle, this frock had turned out so satisfactorily that it could be worn on the street.

The preceding Saturday morning had turned out so disastrously that she felt no matter what happened to-day, it could not be as bad. As she again thought of Jackson Tobet, her eyes flashed fire. But it was just at this point that she found herself on Main Street within a short distance of the Bon Ton Hat Shop.

Now she must not be afraid. She would put out of her mind the unpleasant incident of the preceding week. She should keep her mind on nice thoughts, the kind that would bring her confidence.

"Oh yes, the lovely surprise from Mrs. Ames, the fifty dollar check, the feeling that there was always something good waiting just around the corner!" She stood outside the shop thinking of these things, and after a short time, gained the courage to enter.

There was Miss Amy Bodkins, the owner, pulling a tight-fitting hat over the head of a very

large woman. Allie almost tittered as she watched the proceeding. Anyone could see that the hat was never made for such a person.

"No, that won't do," the customer said, when she looked into the hand mirror. "But I would like something quite small, you know," she explained, bringing her hands to the sides of her face. "Something that fits around the face."

Allie walked off to the side and looked at the row of felt hats which had been reduced. She picked up one after another, looking at them from different angles and handling them carefully.

"How I would love to sell them!" she breathed. "I would much rather do it than go to the tallest mountains in the world."

Now that she was here, the place really seemed alluring, and she felt that trying to sell hats would be actual fun.

"Now what would you like, Allie?" Miss Bodkins asked, coming over to the girl after finishing with her stout customer. Miss Bodkins' sister taught the eighth grade at school, and it was in this way that Allie had become acquainted with Miss Amy.

"I want to work here this summer, Miss Bodkins," the girl announced solemnly.

"To work here, my dear?" the proprietor inquired, with astonishment in her voice.

"Oh, yes! I'd love to sell hats, and I know I

could," Allie hurried to assure her. "I must find a job this summer!"

"But, Allie, I don't need anyone else," the milliner said kindly. "You see, this is a small shop, and there are very few times when I could use another person. I'd like very much to have you if it weren't for that."

"Don't you think there *might* be more customers coming in this summer?" Allie ventured. "Now, with the hot weather, they'll be buying straw hats, and they'll be getting them to go away."

Miss Bodkins laughed softly.

"I think you *could* sell hats, Allie," she said in a complimentary tone. "But really, dear, I wouldn't be able to use anyone, no matter how good a saleswoman she was."

Allie studied the design on the carpet. She could think of nothing further to say.

"If you're set on finding work," Miss Bodkins said pleasantly, "I'll keep my eyes open for you."

"Thank you," Allie responded. "That would be awfully nice of you." She turned and left behind her the emporium of felt and straw hats.

"Some day I'm going to do it," she determined, as she walked out on the pavement. "I'll bet I could tell what kind of hats look well on people and what kind don't, and I'll bet I could find

shapes a lot more becoming than many of these people wear."

The girl now decided to try her fortunes at the drug store.

"I'll have to act in a very grown-up manner," she resolved, as she neared it. At this point a vision of Razoo flashed into her mind and she wondered how it would be possible to greet him properly and appear grown-up on the same occasion.

She entered the store, gave but one side glance at the dog, and walked immediately to Mr. Meyer, who was arranging some bottles near the back of the store.

"Good morning, Mr. Meyer," she greeted him, as she stood by his side. The gentleman was rather hard of hearing and did not notice the soft voice.

Allie reached over and moved one of the bottles to make the arrangement more symmetrical, looking up and smiling as she performed the act. Seeing a mysterious hand assist him, the druggist turned and, when he saw Allie, laughed heartily.

"My, my, what a helpful girl!" he exclaimed in his kindly, genial manner. "I could never have fixed those myself," he said, viewing the pyramid of bottles critically.

Allie smiled broadly too. What a delightful

thing for him to say, she thought, as though he knew what I had come for.

"That's what I want to be, Mr. Meyer," the girl said seriously, the broad smile disappearing. "I came to see if I couldn't really help you every day."

The druggist understood by the girl's earnest tone that she was not merely playing with words. She sounded resolute, determined.

"You don't mean you want a job?" he asked, surprised.

"That's just what I want, Mr. Meyer," Allie said. "I want to start next week just as soon as school is out. Is there——"

"Well, Allie," the druggist interrupted, "this isn't the place for you. We never hire any girls. We need only one errand boy. I'd like to have you here if we could, but, you see, it isn't possible."

"I thought maybe you'd be busier during the summer, or maybe you'd be having vacations and need somebody extra," the girl suggested. She had thought of so many possibilities on the way down.

"No, no," Mr. Meyer said. "We all do a little extra to make up for the one on his vacation. I'm sorry, Allie."

Again the girl was refused. She walked from

the store, having managed to say a few parting words without any tears appearing.

"I won't cry! I won't cry!" she repeated to herself as she left the store. But she felt very desolate on her way home. She could not bring herself to try at any other store. It was too disheartening. True, everyone was good to her, but that after all did not help getting work if there was no work to be had.

"I *must* find a job so I can earn some money!" she murmured. "But it looks as though I weren't wanted anywhere."

CHAPTER VII

THE RAINBOW TRAIL

On entering the studio, Allie Dunham found her father looking very thoughtful. In his hand he held a letter over which he was evidently pondering.

"See this, my dear," he said handing her the sheet.

"My dear Paul:" she read. "The other day when I dropped in to see Jim Hampton I happened to see one of your pictures which he had bought. I then realized how long it had been since I bought those two magazine covers you made. They were corking good ones. Are you doing any more of that sort of work? Tell me, Paul, are you making good out there? Seems to me you're pretty far from things. Why don't you come East? I could easily use more of your work. In fact, I'm interested in several magazines here in Boston, and it would be a fine field for you. Let me hear from you. I will be glad to advance train fare if you wish it.

"Your old friend,

"George Sunwich."

With the reading of each line, Allie's expectations had risen, and now she could see a silver path stretched ahead only waiting to be walked on. She looked at her father in beaming silence.

"We'll go, shan't we, Dad?" Allie asked, surprised at his lack of joy.

"We should, Allie," the artist said slowly. "But it goes against me to have to ask Sunwich for the fare. I hate to do it," he added, with tightened lips.

"But, Dad, if he's wealthy, he won't mind," the girl argued. "Besides, we'll be able to pay it back before long. Oh, Dad," she cried, "I do so want to leave this place. I know you can make good. I just know you can!"

"I owe it to you, Allie," he said with feeling. "You've gone through this whole miserable time without a word of complaint, and now it's time I'm swallowing my pride and striking out." The artist suddenly seemed to have changed. "I'll write him to-day," he said firmly.

Allie was overjoyed. The whole black past seemed already washed away, and the brightness of the future beamed and smiled.

"I won't say anything about the jobs," she decided.

The next hour settled their move. Mr. Dunham wrote the letter to his friend accepting the invitation and explaining his financial struggle.

"I dislike having to accept the train fare even temporarily," he wrote, "but believe me, George, it's the only way we could get there."

Allie immediately rushed off to town with the letter. Her joy expressed itself in her elastic step and radiant smile; and, as she greeted her friends passing on the street, the ringing, almost hilarious voice betrayed her mood. Never had Allie been so gay.

The following week, although a very busy one at school, was no less busy at home. The move to Boston seemed a permanent thing. Consequently, Mr. Dunham was anxious to make some disposal of their household furniture.

"I think the best thing we can do," he said, "is to sell what we can here and ship only a few things to Boston. If we're not fortunate in selling it, we can always store part of it here."

"But some of the things, Dad, we wouldn't want to sell, even if we could," Allie objected. "It would just kill me to think of selling that dining-room set." This indeed, was a beautifully carved walnut set which had been bought by Paul Dunham's grandfather.

"Of course, we'll store that temporarily, until we're settled in Boston," the artist agreed.

Allie's farewells were anything but sad. She took special delight in saying good-bye to Amy

and Babs, for although she was fond of the girls, she felt a certain unexpressed superiority in their manner when they spoke of leaving Groverbury for the summer. Now that she was going to Boston, their trips to the farm and to the mountains seemed insignificant by comparison.

By the end of that week, all arrangements had been made. Mr. Sunwich, upon receipt of the letter from the artist, had wired him a generous amount which not only paid both their fares but guaranteed their comfort in Boston for a time, at least.

The furniture had all been taken care of and the house had been put in the hands of a real estate man who already had prospects of renting it for the summer. Consequently, the following Saturday morning, they were ready to leave, school having been dismissed for the year the preceding day.

Mrs. Ames was on the front porch waiting for them as they left the house. She was sitting on the steps, and by her side was a good-sized box wrapped in tissue paper.

"Just a few things for you to open on the train," she said, as she handed the box to Allie. "And don't forget if there's anything at all I can do for you, just write me."

Allie sat by the train window straining her eyes for every possible last view of Groverbury. She

had been glad to leave it; but now, with the actual going, she felt a pang of sorrow. Her father, too, was very quiet. He thought of it as a solemn occasion. He was leaving the place where he had been born and brought up and where his father and grandfather had lived, the place he had always known as home. It *was* a solemn occasion.

"It'll be so exciting to sleep on the train," Allie chirped. With all these new experiences, her sorrow at leaving Groverbury was short-lived. "I'm dying to see how they can ever make a bed out of these seats. Looks as though you'd have to stretch across from one seat to the other, and then after you'd go to sleep, you'd fall to the floor in the middle."

"Oh, no," the artist laughed. "The porter pushes the seats together. There's no danger of falling down in the middle."

"Well, that top berth must be just like a folding bed," Allie observed. "I should think there'd be all kinds of danger of rolling off into the aisle. I'm glad I'm not up there. I know I'd fall out a couple of times during the night."

They discovered in the course of the day that Mrs. Ames' box contained chicken sandwiches, cakes, and apples. These they devoured in the afternoon. In the evening, however, they went into the dining car, which was also a source of delight to the girl.

"It's like eating in a swinging hammock," she said, as they sat down at the table. "Look! It's difficult to keep liquids in their containers unless the glass or cup is but partially full."

The evening and the night passed without excitement. Somewhat to Allie's surprise, no one fell out on the floor, nor was there any need of stretching across the seats. She found that when the berth was made up, the seats were converted into a comfortable, immaculate bed which was very tempting for sleep.

This experience, however, was too exhilarating to permit her to sleep. So Allie crawled into her berth, bumped her head and elbows several times while undressing, then snapped up the shade, turned off the light, and sat watching the darkness without.

"It's too wonderful to be true," she breathed. "To actually be on a train rushing through the night!"

She smiled as she watched the stars, the flickering lights of houses in the distance, and an occasional machine passing on a near-by road. She watched far into the night and only slept when she fell in sheer exhaustion.

The next morning she was awakened by her father's voice coming from outside the curtain, reinforced by a tap on the shoulder.

"Time to get up," he called. The artist had

been awake since daybreak, and by this time was very hungry.

Allie pulled on her clothes and stepped out into the aisle. She was extremely surprised to find that all the berths except hers had been made up. She must have slept late.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, "is it as late as it looks?"

"Later," her father replied. "Hurry to the dressing room and wash, or they won't let us into the dining car."

CHAPTER VIII

THE METROPOLIS

THAT day they reached New York City, which to Allie Dunham seemed the most intricate place in the world. They stepped off the train into the station and the girl clutched her father's arm tightly. They both found this arrangement inconvenient, since the artist carried a large suitcase in each hand, but on no condition could the girl be persuaded to release her hold.

People were racing past them at a mad gait; colored boys with red caps bustled back and forth carrying baggage, the passengers following; taxicabs were honking their horns. Such frenzied activity overwhelmed the girl and she felt very small and strange.

They walked to the package room where the artist checked their suitcases. Then he took Allie by the arm.

"It's good to see old New York again," he said cheerfully. "I used to know it backwards and forwards when I was at the art school here."

Allie's confidence suddenly returned to her. She looked around with a different feeling. No need

to be fearful. Her father knew all about everything, where to go, how to get there, how to take care of her. It was indeed an adventure.

"Do people ever get used to all this noise?" the girl asked. Into her ears came such a roar of sound as she had never dreamed existed. It was even hard to hear her own words!

Her father did not answer the question. When she glanced up at him, she saw him puzzling over something. Then he pulled her over to the side away from the crowd.

"I'd give anything to see Jean Malot!" he exclaimed. "But I don't know where in the world to find him. He must be in the East, but where, I don't know."

Allie watched the endless rush of people. Every nationality was here, at least it seemed so. She had never seen so many strange-looking people. And all in a hurry. Again her father was guiding her through the crowds.

"I'll look in the phone book," he decided. "I may be able to find him there."

A few minutes later he emerged from the phone booth elated.

"We'll just have time to make it," he said. "I can't get him on the phone, but we may as well try going over. You'll see what Greenwich Village looks like, Allie. You remember my telling you about it."

After consulting a guard on the subway, Mr. Dunham was assured of going in the right direction. During these years, things had changed.

Allie found herself in a long train with seats all facing the center. There was such a terrific noise that she could not even talk with her father. At a maddening rate the train was traveling through the blackness of the tunnel, swinging about corners, and speeding past an occasional light that flashed by in a second.

"This is our stop!" the artist said, as the train came to a standstill.

It seemed as though a hundred other people were also getting off and rushing as if they wished to leave instantly. Allie had never seen such an impolite crowd. People bumped into her, stepped on her toes, pushed, jammed, without ever a word of apology! She could not understand it.

They walked up a long stairway and were once again in the daylight, for which the girl was thankful. She breathed a sigh of relief.

"Wait a minute, Dad, until I catch up with myself," the girl cried. "Goodness, I haven't even had room to think!"

"That's a taste of New York, my dear." The artist smiled, not with the bewilderment which the girl felt, but with a spirited expression as though he greatly enjoyed it.

"Oh, I hate it!" Allie exclaimed vehemently.

"So did I when I was first here," her father said. "But now it's great! Why, Allie, it's like a hundred horses pulling you along and making you go when you've always wanted to, but couldn't muster up the courage. It's something in the air," he mused. "Something that says do or die."

The girl looked at him in amazement. It was a long time since she had heard him use that tone. It was like her father of old from whom she had learned her enthusiasm.

"Can't you just feel it in the air, Allie?" he demanded.

They were walking over Eighth Street now, and the girl's eyes were darting from one side to the other. She saw nothing but tall brick houses coming right down to the sidewalk, without front yards and without a sign of a tree. Machines were speeding by at the same terrific rate with which everything seemed to move in New York. Every person seemed to be in a hurry.

Her father consulted his slip of paper.

"Here we are," he announced, as they turned into one of the four-story, red-brick houses. "It would be like old times if Jean were here."

The names of the occupants of the house were arranged on a chart outside the door, and by the side of each name was a bell. Jean Malot's name was listed as being on the first floor, and after

ringing the bell, the artist impatiently tapped his foot, eager to see his old friend yet fearful of being disappointed.

There came a clicking of the lock of the door, and Mr. Dunham opened it. At the second door an old man was standing, looking up at them expectantly.

"Will you tell me which is Jean Malot's studio?" the artist inquired of him.

"Right here," he said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, I'd be much obliged if you could tell me where I could find him this afternoon. I'm an old friend, and will be here only until five o'clock."

"I'm afraid I don't remember," the fellow said. "My eyesight is bad these days. When was it I knew you?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the artist, understanding that this was another man by the same name. "No, the Jean Malot I knew is my age. We went to school here years ago. You don't know of him, do you?"

"I've heard of him. He's an illustrator. But I don't know where he is."

The artist's spirits sank. As he and his daughter walked over to the subway, however, he consulted his watch and realized that if they were to catch their boat, they would have to hurry.

"We've got to get our luggage at the railroad

station and get over to the wharf by five o'clock!" he exclaimed. "I had no idea there was so little time left."

They rushed into the subway, boarded a train, and in a few minutes emerged from the car at the Thirty-third Street stop. The artist, taking Allie's arm, guided her in and out through the crowds to the package counter.

"Look at the clock, Dad!" she exclaimed, when they turned away from the counter.

"Whew!" he cried. "Just sixteen minutes to get there! Follow me out, Allie. We'll rush up and get a taxi."

In a second the door of the machine had slammed shut and they were on their way. Now they appreciated the speeding cars. The driver slipped in and out of places that seemed unbelievably small. Allie expected any minute to hear the scraping of fenders or the jamming of one car into another. How these drivers could measure distances!

Presently they came to a stop at a crossing. There was nothing to do but wait, and the minutes seemed interminable. The signals were against them, so there was nothing to be done.

The artist was clearly nervous. He took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, taking out and consulting his watch every few minutes.

"Shall we make it, Dad?" the girl asked.

"It's mighty close!" he replied. "Our boat goes at five," he informed the driver.

"I'll get there," the driver answered confidently, without looking around.

There was another crossing and another wait. Again the artist became fidgety. Allie, however, was so intent on the bustle of activity in the streets that she forgot the lateness of the hour.

Suddenly they heard the whistle of a boat, and, peering ahead down the wharf, could see a steamer moving out from the pier. They must have missed it!

CHAPTER IX

THE JOURNEY'S END

"Oh, the boat's gone!" moaned Allie Dunham, as the taxicab stopped.

"That's not the Boston boat," the driver said, as the artist hurriedly thrust the money into his hand. "Yours is down to the left. You can make it if you hurry."

Down the pier they rushed, Allie speeding ahead, the artist following as fast as the two heavy valises would allow. The officers at the entrance of the Boston boat, catching sight of them, delayed their departure, and in a few minutes father and daughter stood on deck attempting to get their breath as they watched the churning water below.

"You can't tell me that isn't soapsuds!" a small boy near by exclaimed, as he watched the foamy water.

The trip was indeed a pleasant one. Allie and her father were fortunate in getting chairs at the bow of the boat on the upper deck, and as the harbor continued to offer variety, they appreciated every bit of it. They even begrudged the hour

required to have dinner, so eager were they to remain on deck.

When darkness fell there was less to be seen, but still the fascinating lights along the shore kept them interested.

"You're not getting sleepy, are you?" the artist inquired later, as he saw Allie yawn.

"Well, no," Allie answered, hesitating.

"That's what the salt air does to you," the artist said. "I'll be ready to turn in myself pretty soon."

Not long after Mr. Dunham took Allie to her stateroom.

"You won't be afraid now, will you?" he asked. "Mine is right next door, you know. If you get afraid, just knock on the wall."

But Allie Dunham slept so soundly she had no time to become afraid. It was fun to be rolled around from one side of the berth to the other when the water was rough, but even that did not keep her awake.

The next morning Mr. Dunham knocked on her door, and in an incredibly short time they were walking up a street in Boston in search of a restaurant.

After breakfast came the formality of finding a hotel where they could deposit their bags and freshen up.

Walking up the street, they spied the sign of a

hotel, and although it appeared old and rather ordinary, they decided to stop. They could always look about afterwards. Just now the important thing was to leave their bags so that they could hunt up George Sunwich.

"Will you tell me how to get to Marlborough Street?" the artist asked of the desk clerk, and gave the number desired.

"Where? Boston?" the young fellow asked.

"Why, yes," the artist answered, his tone intimating that the clerk's question was stupid.

"You see, there are so many other places strung alone," the young man explained, "that people as often as not mean Brookline or Newton, or another one of the suburbs."

The clerk gave them explicit directions for the subway, explaining carefully how to change at Park Street, taking a car there for Massachusetts Avenue. "Or maybe you'd rather walk," he suggested, seeing the bewildered look on the artist's face.

"Yes, we might as well walk if it isn't too far," Mr. Dunham agreed, knowing that he would never be able to follow all of those intricate directions.

Their route seemed quite simple, but to make certain, the artist jotted down the streets where they were to turn and the number of blocks they were to walk in each direction.

"How does anyone ever find his way around here?" Allie exclaimed. "The streets curve so that after half an hour's walking you can expect to find yourself at the same place you start."

As a matter of fact, that was exactly, except as to the matter of time, what happened to the artist and his daughter. They had started away from the hotel, attempting to follow the clerk's directions carefully. But, unfortunately, they missed one street, and in attempting to get back on their line of march they followed one of the winding streets for which the old section of Boston is noted.

Finally, however, after asking many pedestrians along the way, they arrived at Park Street from which point the hotel clerk had assured them their path would be simple.

"After that just walk through the Common and the Public Garden," he had said, "and you'll find yourself within a stone's throw of Marlborough Street."

"So this is the famous Boston Common!" Allie exclaimed, as they stepped off Park Street and followed the sidewalk across what appeared to be a park.

"Yes, and I imagine it looked very different a hundred and fifty years and more ago when the British and American soldiers had their squabble here," her father said.

"Aren't those pigeons darling?" the girl exclaimed, her historic interest giving way, as it always did, to the things at hand. "And just see how many there are! Their iridescent necks are so handsome."

Hundreds of tame pigeons hovered about, standing with their little pink feet on the hot pavement, waiting to be fed by passersby. Early as it was, some idlers were doling out peanuts to them.

"Now I suppose we go right through the Public Garden across the street," the artist decided.

In the Public Garden were beautifully and artistically arranged flower beds and huge trees. By this time, however, the artist was so intent on reaching his friend's house that he took little notice of his surroundings, nor of Allie's enthusiastic remarks.

Shortly they reached Arlington Street, and a policeman standing near by informed them that Marlborough Street was only a block to the right.

"We can't be wrong now," the artist said. "I'm sick of getting lost. I've always heard these streets were hard to get around in. I certainly believe it now."

After fifteen minutes walk they reached the number for which they were looking, and it was with a deep sense of relief that they walked up and rang the bell.

With the opening of the door appeared a stiff-looking person, evidently the butler. His raised eyebrows formed themselves into a question.

"Is Mr. Sunwich in?" the artist asked, feeling that now their worries were at an end.

"No, Mr. Sunwich is not in," the fellow said rather formally.

"Can you tell me when he will be?" the artist asked, then, as an afterthought, he added: "or where I can reach him?"

"He is away from the city," the butler replied with cold dignity, standing very erect.

Mr. Dunham bowed his head. What a blow! Away from the city when he was expecting them —evidently without leaving any word! And he had always considered George Sunwich a staunch and dependable friend!

The butler seeing the crestfallen countenance of the artist, evidently felt sorry for him, because some of the pompousness disappeared now. With a tone of real concern, he asked:

"Is there anything I can do for you? Are you friends of Mr. Sunwich?" From his former stiff manner, one would never have suspected he was capable of such feelings of humanity.

At these encouraging words, the artist looked up.

"We've come all the way from the Middle West," he replied, "and from Mr. Sunwich's

letter, I thought he would be in Boston when we got here." No need saying he had written for them to come, had sent money for their fare, and had offered to help the artist in his work!

"Oh, is that so!" the butler said now, truly interested. "Well, Mr. Sunwich left several days ago for Nova Scotia. An uncle of his up there was dying, and he left in such a hurry I suppose he didn't have time to write to anyone."

"Do you expect him back soon?" the artist asked.

"I don't think he intended being gone long," the butler replied. "But I don't know just when he will return."

Walking down the street, father and daughter listlessly made their way in the direction of the hotel.

"That's a shame!" Allie exclaimed. "I don't see why his uncle had to be dying, anyway, just when we come up."

"It makes things look rather black," her father said slowly. He was too worried to respond to Allie's levity.

CHAPTER X

IN BOSTON WITHOUT ANCHORAGE

ALLIE DUNHAM looked eagerly about her. Marlborough seemed to be a street of massive, beautiful houses, built one against the other, and set very near the sidewalk.

"Aren't these houses queer, Dad?" Allie observed. "If a house like this was in Groverbury, it would have a huge yard around it. It would be set back far from the street, and there'd be trees on both sides."

It was not Allie's youthfulness which made her conversation take such flights in the midst of their keen disappointment. Rather was it her overmature development. During these last few years she had become braver and braver, and many times in the face of her father's despondency, it was the girl and not the artist who took charge of the situation.

"Why do you suppose they built streets like this?" Allie was not as eager to know the reason for such building as she was to have her father relieve his mind, if only temporarily, from the burden.

"They had to conserve space," he replied. "Besides, they were guided by English architecture." But he was far from interested in the subject, Allie observed.

"It's queer about Sunwich," he commented, after a short silence. "Wonder if he wasn't sincere about it after all."

"Why, of course he was, Dad," Allie cried. "Of course he was! I'll bet if you had a rich uncle dying, you'd go off and forget everything, too. I mean, of course, if you thought a lot of him. I'm just awfully glad we're here. The more I look around the gladder I am. Oh, Dad!" she exclaimed, with strong feeling, "I'm so relieved to be away from Groverbury. Every time I think about it, I just take a deep breath and feel happy."

"It's all so uncertain, Allie," the artist said, shaking his head. "It isn't as though we were settled here. If there was only some one we knew!" Again he resumed his helpless tone. After a minute, he turned and looked at the girl with troubled brow.

"Allie," he said, "it's curious you never said anything about disliking Groverbury before. I didn't know that you felt that way about it."

The girl smiled wistfully.

"You had enough other things to worry you without my fussing," she said. "It would have

made me feel a lot worse to have you worrying about it."

"What was the trouble, Allie? Was it anything special?"

"Well, I suppose it was clothes, most of all," the girl decided. "You see, they always invited me to their old parties, but after they got there, they'd make such a fuss about each other's dresses that it would make me just furious!" Allie's voice became more vehement as she progressed, but her father did not interrupt the flow of thoughts.

"That other party Amy had—" the girl explained, turning to her father as they walked along. "You know, the one she had a few months ago. Well, it happened that almost everybody there had on a new dress, because it was right after Easter. After we got there Mrs. Caruthers came in and started saying a lot of things about everybody's clothes. Then she said, 'Girls, let's make bouquets of the same colored flowers.' So she had all the girls in orange stand around the fireplace, and those in pink over by the reception hall, and the blues and greens in separate places.

"Well, you remember, I wore that old dark blue dress of mine. So, naturally, there I was sticking out like a sore thumb, without another girl in dark things.

" 'Guess I'll have to be the foliage for the bouquets,' I said, trying to laugh it off. But I

just felt tied up in a knot inside. I wanted to rush out on the porch where it was dark so I could cry my eyes out, or else crawl away back under the baby grand piano and sit on the floor so no one could see me."

Allie stopped a second to catch her breath, for the volley of words had come fast. The artist patted her shoulder.

"That's all over now," he said, "and I hope you won't have to be humiliated about clothes again." Again he relapsed into silence.

As they passed over one of the side streets, Allie stared down to the left. By the time they reached the further curb her mind was made up.

"I do believe that's the ocean, Dad!" she exclaimed, taking his arm and leading him down the cross street. "Do you see all that water down there and the railing?"

Unprotesting, the artist allowed himself to be guided. "It's the Charles River, my dear," he said. "Don't think that the ocean is that meek."

"This must be the Esplanade," he said as they reached the water's edge. "I came up to Boston for a week-end when I was going to school in New York, and many of these names have slipped my mind. But I'm quite sure of this. They were constructing it then."

"What's on the other side?" Allie asked, looking across the wide expanse of water.

"That's Cambridge," the artist replied, becoming somewhat interested. "Now, I believe that bridge straight ahead is the Cambridge bridge, and the one away back there is the Harvard bridge."

"Those are certainly some beautiful buildings," the girl said, looking across the river. "See that one especially—the one with the rounded dome. Isn't that lovely?"

"Those buildings along there," the artist replied, "must be the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. You'll hear it referred to as Tech or M. I. T. Then the Harvard campus is quite a distance over."

"Oh!" Allie breathed. "All those places! I've always thought of them as being so far away. And we're actually here!"

"Yes, for better or for worse." Invariably did his tone fall back into a state of forlorn hope. Just at the time when his young daughter thought she was getting him interested.

Allie Dunham was quite enthusiastic over her discovery. A broad walk was bordered on the left by the gently flowing Charles River, while on the right was a wide parkway of grass with an occasional tree. Looking back farther one could see the backs of apartments and large houses.

After following the Esplanade for some time,

they turned away from it and found themselves again in the Public Garden.

"Where to now, Dad?" Allie asked.

"Looks like a stone wall to me," the artist said disconsolately. "If we only knew when Sunwich would get back."

"Yes, I wish we did," Allie agreed. "Or I wish we knew someone else."

Now they had crossed Charles Street and were again entering the Common. They walked on silently. Allie linked her arm in her father's while her eyes lingered on the beauty of the flowering plants. The flower beds were arranged in perfect rows, not a leaf seemed out of place.

Suddenly Allie felt her father's arm become tense. He stopped, and as she looked at him, his eyes were wrapped in profound thought.

"Come on back," he said in a hoarse voice. "I think I know that face."

CHAPTER XI

A FRIEND IN NEED

SLOWLY, Allie Dunham and her father retraced their steps, then stopped by the side of a bench which contained two men. The artist stood scrutinizing the man nearest the edge, as Allie looked from one to the other hopefully.

After a few minutes, Mr. Dunham seemed to have made up his mind.

"Pardon me, sir," he said. "But are you not Jean Malot?"

The man, who had been making some notes on a paper, looked up, and Allie was overjoyed to see recognition light his eyes.

"Well, if it isn't Paul Dunham!" he said without a moment's hesitation. He arose and shook the artist's hand heartily. "And do you mean to say that this is your daughter—grown so big?" His friendly face included Allie, and she felt drawn to him at once.

"It's mighty good to see you," Paul Dunham said. "We tried to find you yesterday afternoon in New York."

"I've been here now for several years," Jean

Malot said. "But tell me, what brings you here? I thought you were anchored for life in the Middle West. But, to tell the truth, I often wondered why you didn't come East. Hope you're not here on just a visit."

"No, indeed, not if we can help it," Mr. Dunham said firmly. "But I'll tell you, Jean, I'm not sure just what would have happened if we had not run into you."

"Why, you look like a prosperous business man to me," Jean said. "Are you in earnest? What do you say if we walk along and talk," he suggested, thinking of the curious ears by their side.

"Never had more reason to be earnest in my life," the girl's father said.

In a few words he narrated the story of their trip to Boston, the borrowed money, and George Sunwich's absence from the city.

"Didn't he leave word?" Jean asked, seeming perturbed. "But of course," he added, "under those circumstances, a person doesn't think of anything. He just goes."

"You know, Mr. Malot," Allie interrupted, "I think somebody simply planted you here just so we'd find you."

"Wouldn't doubt it at all," he said. "As a matter of fact, I very seldom come here. To-day I went to see someone on Beacon Street and just

sat down here to jot down some things while I thought of them. I hadn't been here five minutes." His friendliness and sincerity had made Allie Dunham like him immediately, and each time he spoke the girl felt a closer bond of friendship.

As they walked through the Public Garden, the pigeons, proud and boastful, strutted before them. Allie noticed each detail, and continued to make inward comparisons between home and here. Each observation was weighed by its comparison with Groverbury. And each thing that was different, Allie thought was queer.

Groverbury's park was at the edge of town and contained a ball park. This place was a large square plot given over to flower gardens and trees, and, to be sure, pigeons. They seemed to have as definite a place in the scheme of things as the very trees. And evidently they knew it, for they would strut along just ahead or so near along the side that the girl felt afraid she might walk on them, and when they swooped down from above, they often flew dangerously near.

Allie walked along by her father's side listening to the talk, but often finding that her mind was wandering along the line that her eye was taking across the park. There was so much to see!

Suddenly Allie's wandering mind was called to attention.

"I know just the thing!" Jean Malot was say-

ing. "The top floor of our house has been vacant a long time, and I know that you can have it for a song. It's unfurnished, though," he added, his brows wrinkling. "I didn't think of that."

At this point Allie could keep silent no longer.

"Unfurnished!" She exclaimed, her voice fairly dancing through the air. "As though that made a bit of difference! Do you remember that little cottage, Dad, over at the edge of town? You know how that group of college girls took it over and got odd pieces of furniture here and there, painted it up, and made it look perfectly darling! Oh! how I'd love to do something like that!"

The two men looked at her, amazed. Could this be the child who had been walking by their side a moment before. Could this youngster have all these ideas and still appear so very young?

"I believe you could manage it," Jean Malot said, smiling. "If you wish to come over right away, you can see it now."

"I'd love to!" Allie breathed. Nothing had appealed to her imagination so strongly for ages! she thought. To think that they would be able to get furniture, piece by piece, make cunning little pillows, fluffy curtains—it all seemed too wonderful to believe.

As they walked the two men talked of their beloved art, the prospects for Paul Dunham, and various channels for the sale of paintings. Along

by their side glided Allie, serenely unaware for the moment that there was anything in the world one could call a problem. She was only conscious that they had arrived in Boston, had found a friend who was taking care of them, and that nothing really mattered besides that.

And her father was so happy! That made her happy too. So long had he been discouraged, with no one to talk with who really understood his love of art or who could talk about the things that interested him. Goodness! she could not remember how long it had been since she had seen him so animated, his eyes so glistening and happy, his voice so deep and fine and confident. And so interested! She would love Jean Malot if only because he made her father so radiant.

"Where do all these sailors come from?" the girl asked, as she watched the frequent groups pass by. Many of them were rather short and dark, and most all seemed very young.

"My dear, don't you know that Boston is a port?" her father explained. "Ships from foreign lands are always coming and going."

Never in her life had Allie seen so many uniforms, and most of them seemed to be those of sailors. She remembered when Jack Palfrey had returned to Groverbury in his uniform. That was many years ago, and the girls had all admired him. Of course, she had seen many sailors in moving

pictures, but they seemed so different in real life—and to be actually passing them on the street!

"It's right down this street," Jean Malot informed them, after they had walked a short distance.

These were also three- and four-story houses, but seemed much older and darker than those which Allie had admired on Marlborough Street. Here there was no grass at all, for the houses were built directly against the sidewalk, and there was not a sign of a tree.

Many people and children were walking about and Allie noticed with some misgiving that papers and rubbish were occasionally strewn over the sidewalk and street. So different from the section where George Sunwich lived. There everything was immaculate.

"Here we are!" said their guide, as he led them up the steps of a large red brick house. Allie caught a glimpse of a window, half way below the sidewalk level, where some musical instruments were displayed.

The many stores in the East that were really in the basement mystified the girl from the Middle West. Groverbury had nothing like this. Still, it was rather quaint, and she decided that on the whole, she liked them.

When they reached the third floor, Jean Malot stood aside, motioning them to enter his room.

It was a long studio, one end of which faced the street, there being a skylight which furnished a brightness not found in the other rooms of the house.

The easel stood facing the window, and near by to the left was the work table containing many large and small brushes, paints, and tubes. The whole scene was familiar to Allie, for she had learned to walk going in and out her father's studio at home. But everything here was more artistic and elaborate, she decided.

The other end of the room was furnished with over-stuffed chairs, a lounge covered with blue velvet and piled with pillows, and a small teak-wood table with fancy carving along its edge and inlaid with mother of pearl.

"It's simply gorgeous!" Allie gasped, after her first sweeping glance had traversed the room.

"Mighty fine arrangement for your work," her father commented.

"I've read about rooms like this!" Allie beamed. "Except that when they're described in books, it always must be winter, for you can see the huge fireplace with the flames leaping up and sitting in front are authors and artists. Then it always tells how the soft light plays on their faces and makes them very interesting and beautiful."

"Little girl, we'll have as many grate fires as you like later on. Come to think of it," remarked

Jean Malot, "the last one we had was about two weeks ago. I'm sure you could never say that about the weather where you come from."

"Well, hardly," his friend agreed. "It warms up so much in May that——"

"That we can get some unusually pretty logs and arrange them to last all summer in the grate," Allie finished. "I fixed it this year," Allie mused, "and put some cedar branches on top."

Jean Malot moved toward the door and waited until the girl had finished with her reminiscences.

"We'll go upstairs now and you can see the place I spoke of."

After the brightness of the room, the stairway appeared especially bleak, but after half the flight had been covered, their eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness, and Allie no longer stubbed her toes on the tread ahead.

"We arrive, Mademoiselle!" announced Jean Malot, with a low bow and making a gracious gesture with his hands.

"Oh, yes!" Mr. Dunham said, as he glanced about at the three rooms comprising the fourth floor.

Allie had not quite recovered from the shock of disappointment prompted by a comparison of the two floors. Jean Malot's beautifully furnished, immense studio made these three small bare rooms appear insignificant. Only a minute's

silence, however, was necessary for the girl's imagination to regain its ground.

"Can't you just *see* how cute this will be after it's furnished?" she exclaimed. "That will be your room, Dad," she announced, motioning to the room on the left, "this will be mine," indicating the one across the hall on the right, "and in here we can have some kind of a cunning little stove and a table painted orange. Won't that be exquisite?"

The two men again looked at the girl who had risen so nobly to the occasion. Jean Malot had felt keenly that first reaction from his friends. But now Allie's expression of appreciation had reassured him. If this girl could carry out her ideas with the assurance in which she expressed them, there would be no difficulty.

"The rooms on this floor are built only over the back part of the house," Jean explained. "That accounts for mine in the front having the skylight. But you'll have a pretty good light up here, too. It's north light, you see."

"That's like the light you painted by at home, Daddy," observed Allie.

"The plans sound fine," Paul Dunham said. "But it will be hard to furnish a room with ideas unless we have the furniture too."

"Don't you worry about that," his friend said. "We'll work that out some way."

Paul Dunham said nothing more just then, but he wondered what the instruments for working it out would be.

Allie did not quite understand how it would be done, but she felt that it was only a problem to work on, and that sooner or later the answer would present itself.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW HOME

ALLIE DUNHAM awakened the next morning in her room at the hotel and smiled happily as she looked around at the walls. She did not see the faded blue paper with the roses which at one time had been red, nor did she see the ugly brown washstand in the corner which was a sorry example of the need of paint.

No indeed! With half closed eyes she visioned the soft cream walls, the bedroom set which would be painted ivory, and the creamy muslin curtains that she herself would make while her father was painting.

Across the breakfast table that morning in a tiny restaurant near the hotel, father and daughter laid their plans.

"Jean Malot is simply a peach, Dad, isn't he?" Allie, breaking her piece of toast, looked about for more butter.

Her father smiled and nodded.

"We can go right over, can't we, Dad?" she asked, impatient to get started in their new home without a minute's delay.

"No, we'd better not rush Jean the first thing in the morning," the artist advised. "You see——"

"But he said we should come over this morning," Allie argued.

"My dear, we can't expect him to spend all his time arranging things for us. Give him a breathing time."

"Then let's walk around Beacon Hill," Allie suggested.

"You know it's called Beacon Hill where we're to live, too," her father informed her.

This was a surprise to the girl, for although they had walked up and down very hilly streets, the one on which Jean Malot lived had no slope at all.

"It's the edge," her father explained. "Jean tells me that in his house are many artists, writers, and musicians. There's splendid fellowship there. It will be good to be in such an environment—after Groverbury," he added, with some bitterness.

"I'd like to be as confident about the furniture as Jean is," he went on. "Personally, I can't see where it's coming from."

"But you don't really mind, do you, Dad?" Allie often asked these vague questions. She meant to ask if he minded even though he did not know where the furniture was coming from, but he misinterpreted the question.

"No, I don't mind if Jean is confident about it," he answered. "He always was true blue, and I don't mind any arranging he does."

They walked up and down hills, up such steep ones that Allie's legs fairly ached as they rounded the crest of the hill, but, fortunately, the locomotion of descending required different muscles, which rested the already tired ones.

"Oh, dear!" Allie exclaimed. "I've seen almost enough for this morning, Dad. Don't you think we could go over there now? It's really not too early any more."

So they turned several corners, found they had lost their sense of direction, and finally, after asking two policemen, found their way to the place that was to be their future home.

"Here we are!" Allie announced, as they were greeted at his door by Jean Malot.

"Well, now you both sit down and I'll tell you all about the plans. I've been pretty busy since I've seen you, getting things worked out, seeing people and the landlord. It seems to me the top flat was just waiting for you to come. Do you know it's been vacant for nearly four years? Never could rent it. Suppose it's because the house is used mostly for studios in some form or other, and that isn't very large up there."

"Do you really mean that everything is fixed?" Allie burst out.

It was very hard to wait until he told them all about it. But she must. And she must close her lips firmly in order not to interrupt him. She had such a habit of doing that when she was enthusiastic.

"Yes, sir! Everything! I've arranged with the landlord, and you're not to pay a thing until you get on your feet. I'll take care of that. But to tell you the truth, he asked only a song for it. Yes, literally a song," he repeated, smiling at the memory of the low figure.

"Now, Jean," Paul Dunham began with a look of perturbation, "I can't——"

"Now, that's true, you can't do a thing about it," Jean finished, not allowing Mr. Dunham to express his protest. Jean was all ready for the outburst of pride, and knew well that Paul Dunham would dislike accepting all this from his friend.

"As I was saying about the furniture," Jean went on, not allowing Paul time for another interruption, "the major part of that has been arranged, too. I've made a little visit to all the people in the house. You see," he explained, "we've all been together here for a number of years, and we know each other quite intimately. Well, each one of them will contribute a piece of furniture."

Allie's feet bounced up and down on the carpet, while her eyes danced in wonderment. Her whole

reserve of self-control was brought to bear on the situation, but even that was not enough. Every now and then in the plans she would emit an "Oh" and immediately the back of her hand would fly up to her mouth.

"So far," Jean went on, "I've got the necessities contributed and you can move in almost any day. That is," he explained, "I've got a bed, an army cot, a table, a few chairs, and a little electric grill. But the grill is only borrowed," he added, "until you get fixed up with a stove of some kind.

"Then we've made a little fund, too," he continued, "so that you'll be able to buy paint, and material for curtains, and pick up more furniture, secondhand, and things of that sort."

"If anybody had ever told me that this could happen outside a book, I wouldn't have believed him!" Allie exclaimed. "I can hardly believe it yet. Think of the fun of fixing things up!" she beamed, almost overcome by the thought of their good fortune. "I'd much rather have it this way. It's much, much more fun than having money enough to buy everything you want and simply moving it in. Imagine just going down to the store, looking around a while, then saying 'send this out' or 'I think I'll take this table for two hundred dollars.' Oh, Mr. Malot, I can't tell you how happy you've made us! You've been wonderful to do all this."

That very afternoon the Dunhams checked out of their hotel, and with valises in hand walked over to their new home. Their baggage was not the only thing they brought along. Allie wore a radiant smile and her father took a new lease on life. The kindness and generosity displayed by Jean Malot and his neighbors had given him a new trust in man's goodness, and the cynicism which had colored his talk during these last unfortunate years seemed to have disappeared. Such friendship as this could not be taken lightly. It came as a sign from heaven.

Days of frenzied activity followed in which Allie Dunham became acquainted with the occupants of the whole house. Gravely, as though it were a ceremonial, Jean Malot escorted Paul Dunham and Allie through the house, introducing them to each of his friends, and making a special fuss over Allie.

All of them, it seemed, took an immediate fancy to the girl, for they loved in her her buoyancy, her naturalness, and, above all, her cheery manner.

Consequently, when the time came for moving their individual contributions into the top flat, it was not the Dunhams, but the combined efforts of the house which accomplished the task. But Allie found plenty to keep her busy, racing up and down the stairs after a roller which had fallen from the

bed, a screw from the loose arm of a chair, or the small drawer which had slipped from a table.

Finally the collection of furniture was assembled, and in order to give the proper finish to so Bohemian a way of moving, Jean Malot suggested a party, each one bringing a certain supply of food.

In the late afternoon the tenants of the house came trudging up the stairs, Jean Malot leading, and Allie standing at the top of the steps in her pink gingham dress as happy as a humming bird darting after honey-filled flowers.

"Welcome," the girl called to the on-coming people. "Welcome to the top flat!"

There was a chorus of greeting in return, and everybody crowded into the little flat and put down his contribution to the forthcoming feast.

The three musicians who had a studio on the second floor, were women, but the other occupants of the house were men, writers and artists, some of them combining both living quarters and studio in one, as did Jean Malot, and others only working at their studios during the day.

It was at this party that Jean Malot christened Allie as "The Girl in the Top Flat," and ever after she was known to the occupants in that way. Whenever light, bounding footsteps were heard outside their doors, they knew a spirit of radiance was passing by, and their hearts felt gladdened.

Many times for no reason at all they would come to the door just to call out a greeting.

But Allie knew better than to stop to talk. These were busy people, and although they loved to be pleasant and happy, they disliked being interrupted when they were in the midst of work. And of course, she never was sure just when they were the busiest.

CHAPTER XIII

DISAPPOINTMENT

After the first excitement of furnishing the top flat had spent itself and the joy of helpful friends had become an everyday pleasure, Allie Dunham and her father became more serious about the problem of earning a living.

To be self-supporting, their income had to be larger than was necessary in Groverbury, for here rent was a factor. They could not go on forever depending on Jean Malot, despite his generosity. They had hoped for some income from the rental of their old home, but word from their real estate agent had not been encouraging. The prospective tenant they had before they left Groverbury had not taken the place and there were still no other applicants for the house.

Meanwhile the artist worked regularly at his paintings while Allie familiarized herself with the values which she could find in the various second-hand furniture stores. At the end of the second week the top flat was a very prettily furnished place, and even the artists, who were generally

critical, commended Allie on her taste in choosing colors and arranging the various pieces.

"We'll go out to see George Sunwich this afternoon," Paul Dunham announced one morning early in July. "He ought to be home by this time."

"We could call up," ventured Allie.

"Yes, we could. But wouldn't you like the walk?" returned the artist. So they had an early lunch and started.

Allie had planned to make the curtains for the kitchen window that afternoon, and she had understood that her father needed all the time he could find for his work.

Paul Dunham, however, had gone through life doing such things. He followed his whims instead of what he knew he should do. Allie, fortunately, had inherited the practical mind of her mother, and was staunch in following duty's call when once she heard it.

The same stiff butler answered their summons, but at sight of them he became somewhat friendly. He even went so far as to invite them in before he told them of his news.

"I had a letter the other day," he said. "Mr. Sunwich wrote that his uncle was lingering, and so he found he would have to remain in Nova Scotia for some time."

The artist began to ask whether any mention

had been made of their visit, but after the first word was out he thought better of it, and his pride made him switch off to some commonplace remark.

"I don't want him to think I'm dependent on him," he thought.

As they walked away, Allie felt again how bitterly her father accepted disappointment, how keenly he resented the disregard of George Sunwich.

Allie reached home in time to make the curtains, despite the interruption, but she noticed with apprehension that her father painted no more that day.

When she was around he made a pretense of looking through his files, treating his brushes, or mixing his paints; but she knew he was only feigning, and quickly withdrew from the room.

The frustration of their plans in regard to George Sunwich, however, was somewhat softened the following week. Two of the pictures which Paul Dunham had been sending out and which had invariably been returned, now were placed and payment had been made for them. The buyers had even contracted for further pictures.

The prices which the pictures brought, though helpful in paying their debts, were far lower than the figures which the artist thought his work

should bring. However, a little money was better than no money at all.

During this period, their living expenses, which Jean Malot had budgeted for them, continued to grow. The artist materials which Paul Dunham had to buy were indeed no small factor.

One day Allie had a long talk with Miss Baldwin, one of the young musicians on the second floor.

"I'll keep my eyes open for you," she said, when she heard that Allie had now finished the furnishing of the top flat and wanted to find a position.

"Let's see!" Miss Baldwin exclaimed after a minute. "I believe I still have the Sunday paper here. We'll look in that."

She turned to the "Help Wanted" section and ran her finger down the column.

"That won't do. And that won't do," she mused. "No, you're not a stenographer. Plenty of them wanted. And secretaries. No, that won't do. And you're not a hairdresser nor an experienced waitress. My goodness! Typists—that won't do. Salesgirl! What about that, Allie? You'd make a splendid salesgirl, if you don't find anything else, with that sweet voice of yours and your smile."

Allie's eyes glowed. Of course, she would love to be a salesgirl! She always did want to have a

job waiting on people, and goodness knew she had tried hard enough in Groverbury without success. Almost fondly she remembered Miss Bodkins' millinery store.

"Oh, I would love that!" she exclaimed.

A few minutes later Allie raced up the stairs to tell her father of her new prospect, and to show him the clipping. There were very few items that she could answer. In fact, she had only one item, and that was for a ladies' ready-to-wear shop on Boylston Street. Well, at least that would give her a start.

Her father was so busy working that she did not bother him, but went into her room, dressed very carefully and went away, leaving a note for him on the kitchen table.

Finding Boylston Street was much easier than she had anticipated, for Jean Malot had trained her to know the streets which she would use most. There was Tremont on one side of the Boston Common, and running at right angles with that on the other side of the Common was Boylston. "Very simple after you know them," he had said.

"Oh, yes, I see," Allie had answered.

That was another one of her habits. She disliked to appear stupid, and many times, even though she did not exactly comprehend explanations, she would act as though she did. On many occasions awkward consequences resulted, and she

would vow never to use the ruse again. But those were only occasions, and they were soon forgotten.

Allie entered the shop which the advertisement designated. At one glance she was ready to turn around and go out. She had heard of Boston's high-class shops, but this one was really beyond anything she had ever dreamed of. It was a long store with many mirrors, futuristic decorations on the walls, thick, luxurious carpet of green on the floor, and people standing about who looked as though they were going to a dinner.

What elegance! Allie was aghast, but when she wanted to turn and walk out she found she was rooted to the spot. Imagine her fitting into this environment and knowing how to act! Imagine her holding a job here for even five minutes!

There were sylph-like figures of girls, one especially, whom Allie noticed, dressed in black satin with flowing uneven skirt and long close tailored sleeves. With almond-shaped brown eyes, long dark lashes, and a flat waved bob snug against the head, this creature seemed to Allie Dunham the most fashionable person in the world.

As she stood with her back to Allie waiting for her customer to adjust a hat more to her own liking, Allie glanced down at the long, tapered fingers with highly polished pink nails as they rested on the shiny mahogany table.

She was so taken with this graceful creature

that she stared at her as though she were in a trance, and on looking up was positive she saw her double. But it was only a reflection in a long mirror.

Another swan-like figure glided from the back part of the store over the green carpet. She also wore black. Frozen in her tracks, Allie watched her approach. She swept along like a bird, perhaps a peacock, Allie thought.

Allie suspected that the girl was coming to her, and attempted to turn, for this was really her last chance. She could never face the ordeal of trying for work here.

"Did you wish to be waited on?" the girl asked from her lofty height, being much taller than Allie in dignity and austerity if not in inches.

"No, thank you," gurgled Allie. "I was just looking around."

CHAPTER XIV

JOB HUNTING AGAIN

"I WAS too young," Allie Dunham announced, as Miss Baldwin met her on the steps of the studio building. "That was truthful," she decided to herself. No need to acknowledge that she had been scared and had not even tried to apply for the position she had gone to seek. It was not only because she was frightened, she afterward concluded, but because she understood from the appearance of the store that she would never be the type of girl wanted. No, she had not actually been frightened. It was just surprise.

Again she appealed to Miss Baldwin. Despite the fact that the musician was very much occupied in writing letters at her desk, Allie sat down on a chair and waited until she was given attention. She felt past conventions or politeness. The more she thought the more she realized the necessity of her finding work. They simply *had* to have the money.

"I'd really be willing to do almost anything," she announced through perilously dampened eyes. She despised the thought of crying. It was such

a babyish thing to do. But, somehow, she felt very weary and very useless.

"If you even want your room cleaned or anything, I'd be glad to do it," Allie ventured, as Miss Baldwin pushed her letters aside and smiled a welcome.

"Oh, my dear," she answered, "I wouldn't think of letting you do that! It would be much too hard for you. Why, you're just a child," she added pleasantly. "I want you to stop worrying, though," she said severely. "You'll find a job soon. Or, I promise, we'll find you something."

"You're awfully good," Allie said. "I feel as though I could go out and really get a job now." Encouragement from friends did mean so much.

The next morning was so bright and cheerful that it beckoned one to go and seek adventure. There were no birds singing in trees, for there were no trees for them to sing in. There was no sunrise to be seen, for the tall and closely massed buildings kept the sunrise from the view of those who loved it.

"I'm going out for a walk, Dad," she said a short time later, as she hung up the dish towel. "Now don't wear your paint brushes down." That was her customary way of admonishing him not to work too hard.

"You be careful and don't get lost," he warned in return.

"I can always ask a policeman," she laughed over her shoulder. "I'll probably ask plenty before I get through," she thought, as she hurried down the steps.

"Where is the fire, my dear?" asked Miss Baldwin, appearing at her door on hearing Allie's footsteps.

"Ssssh!" whispered the girl. "Promise not to tell Dad till it's all over, and I'll tell you the secret. Down on Tremont Street yesterday," she began in a low voice, stepping inside the room, "I saw a sign 'Girl Wanted.' It was on my way back and I was too weak-kneed to go in. Thought I would get more energy and go back this morning."

"What kind of place?" Miss Baldwin inquired, motioning Allie to a seat on the divan.

"It was a restaurant—or I guess you'd call it a cafeteria," Allie said doubtfully. She was still having difficulty with these two terms. In Groverbury she had never known of such things as cafeterias.

"Well, here's luck to you!" exclaimed Miss Baldwin, displaying crossed fingers. "I have a song called 'The Four Leaf Clover.' I'll play it as you go down the street."

These people in the house helped so much. Not alone with the furniture and the contributions—that was really the least part. It was their friend-

liness and good cheer that counted most to the girl in the top flat.

She had heard that Boston was cold and that its people were not hospitable. If the sample at their new home was representative, then Boston had been falsely described. She had never known such warm-hearted, cordial people, always ready to aid, always going out of their way to give someone a helping hand. It was really beautiful.

When Allie Dunham reached her destination on this day she was resolved, come what might, she would see the thing through. No matter what kind of position it was, she would try, she would give her best. Her actions on the preceding afternoon—her confusion, her stammered reply when asked what she wished—made her feel ashamed.

"It was downright cowardly, that's what it was, to walk off without even trying!" she murmured. "They might have wanted someone to take care of stock or something," she decided. "I'll never again be so silly. Never!"

It was just at the point of this almost verbal determination that she pushed herself through the revolving door of the cafeteria. Fortunately, the "Girl Wanted" sign still graced the window; at least that was the way in which Allie thought of it.

"I came in answer to the sign," Allie announced at the wire cage.

"You're a little early," the cashier said pleasantly. "Just sit down over there and wait."

"Will it be very long?" The question was on the tip of Allie's tongue, but she swallowed it and meekly sat down on the seat indicated. She had no right to ask if it would be very long. She would have waited had it been two minutes or two days. Nothing would stop her this time!

"Thank goodness, they don't have those magnificent people here," the girl thought. She decided that she hated magnificent-looking people. They made her decidedly uncomfortable. It was not their clothes exactly, but it was the way they looked, their superior, overbearing manner.

"I wouldn't mind feeling superior until I get this job," Allie thought restlessly.

She soon became more fidgety, and at that moment, noticing the free scales near by, arose and stepped on it.

"Whew! Only ninety-eight pounds!" she exclaimed, remembering that her former weight was one hundred and six. "Guess I've worked off about eight pounds furnishing that house. The scales are probably wrong, though," she decided, and gave no further thought to the matter.

People passed by in almost endless procession, and as Allie became more and more observant,

she noticed that they looked more pleasant as they came out than when they entered.

"That's what food does," she reasoned.

It was not long before the cashier motioned in Allie's direction.

"There she is," Allie heard her say. A second later a short, dark-complexioned man approached her.

"Had any experience in a restaurant?" he asked. What a dreadful question! People had to get their experience some place!

"Not exactly," Allie hedged. "But I'm sure I could learn."

"Well, maybe you could," he said, his answer coming with the suddenness of a bomb.

"I'd love to try," was all she could say.

"I don't even know what it is," was her second unspoken thought. "Maybe it's scrubbing floors."

She followed the man back of the brass railing, through swinging doors, and found herself in a gigantic kitchen. Everything was immaculate, and steam was issuing from huge aluminum boilers. The men wore white uniforms and little white caps.

Her interrogator hung his hat and coat on a rack and then led the way to the right side of the room where a stout woman was washing piles and piles of dishes.

"Put on an apron, then take a try at it," the

man said. "Your job is wiping them. Think you can do it fast?"

Allie grew faint. Of all things in the whole world that she hated most, wiping dishes headed the list. Wiping dishes! The very letters in the words were distasteful. The very sound of the words was repellent.

As the girl walked toward the rack which contained the aprons, she thought of her home economics class at school. Whenever there were school affairs where food was served, she would always arrange to do some other part of the work instead of wiping dishes. She would choose another task, even though it were longer and harder.

She grew more faint. It was unbearably hot in the kitchen, too, and it smelt of cabbage, an odor she had always disliked.

After slipping on a white apron she turned about to see a boy only a few years older than herself, approach, carrying a bucket of water in each hand. She could see by the way he carried them that they were heavy, but as she looked up to his face, she saw reflected not a disgruntled look from the weight, but a firmly set mouth, and eyes shining with determination. No self-pity was there, nor feeling of resentment. Perhaps he did not relish carrying heavy buckets of water any more than she liked wiping dishes. In a flash, her attitude toward the work changed.

"I'm all ready!" she announced, as she reached the stout woman who was emptying her pan of dishes. She would do her work gladly, and carry on without grumbling. In some strange way this young man with the noble carriage had determined her.

"There's your towel," the woman said pleasantly, nodding toward the near-by chair. "It goes pretty fast here," she added. "It has to."

Allie took the towel and began on the nearest leaning plate. She would try to do the job well, and she would do it with a smile. There was no bravery about grumbling. Already an enormous pile of dishes awaited her, but the speed of the dish washer was prodigious. How could any one wash dishes that fast? And they were clean, too.

For some time Allie tried her best to obey the laws of both speed and efficiency. She could feel the woman watching from the corner of her eye. It was not an unfriendly look, but she felt it to be critical.

After a long period of silence in which Allie became almost breathless in her hurried activity, she stopped a minute to take a long breath and change towels.

"How is that?" Allie asked, hopeful of reassurance, yet fearful too.

"Well, you have to be awfully fast here," the

woman said, with a faint smile. But her tone was not one to instill confidence.

"I can learn to be speedier, I think," Allie cried, again tackling the fast growing pile.

From all around came the clattering of dishes, the crackling sound of frying, and added to all of this was the shouting of orders through the window from the front. At first the cries of orders sounded all the same, but gradually Allie began to distinguish between them.

"Two up," she found to mean fried eggs not turned over, while "two over" meant that they should be turned over.

"Two on a raft," however, was one of the puzzles that took long to unravel. Finally, Allie interpreted the order to mean two poached eggs on toast.

There was just one thing about dish wiping that held a fascination for the girl, and that at home had become a habit. It was the dripping of the water from each dish into one container, preferably a cup, and then seeing how fast she could fill the cup.

Without thinking, Allie began her accustomed sport. An especially significant glance, however, from the stout woman soon finished the performance. After all, each patient drip took time, and here, time counted.

"You certainly do wash them fast," Allie ventured.

"You have to here," was the answer. No time even for talk, Allie found. Everything was sacrificed for speed.

After about two hours of very hard work, the manager, whom Allie found to be the dark little man, came over to the right side of the kitchen.

Turning slightly to place a dish on the table, Allie caught sight of him as he approached. He hardly looked at the girl, but motioned to her co-worker. As he walked on, the woman followed him.

Allie immediately became apprehensive, for she knew that in this woman's estimation she was not rated as a fast worker. And speed was what counted here.

In a few minutes the two returned, the little man walking up to Allie's table.

"You can stay this afternoon if you want to," he said, not unkindly. "But our regular girl has decided to come back to-morrow."

"Oh! I didn't know it was temporary," Allie cried, dismayed.

"It wasn't supposed to be," he answered. "We need somebody faster than you, though. You need a lot more practice before you can hold a job like this."

"No use fussing about it," Allie thought. "I

didn't want the job, anyway! I always did hate to wipe dishes! Besides, it would do no good to say anything."

The hours dragged on. The pile of dishes never decreased. In fact, it increased, thought Allie despondently.

"Dishes, dishes, dishes! I never knew there were so many outside of a china store," sighed the girl, as, tired to the point of exhaustion, she looked toward her hour of release.

That afternoon Allie returned home enriched by a dollar and thirty-five cents.

CHAPTER XV

ATTAINMENT

A FEW days later Allie Dunham was attracted by the sound of her name floating up the steps. She recognized the voice of Miss Baldwin.

"Come down when you can," the voice said. "I have something exciting to tell you." Miss Baldwin was one of those people who called everything exciting or thrilling. But even knowing this characteristic, Allie quickly slipped off her apron.

A few minutes later she was breathlessly listening to the recital of her friend.

"And he said you should come down, Allie," was the end of the story. Miss Baldwin held the girl spellbound as she told her of meeting Mr. Blackhurst, the editor of the *Household Journal*."

"He might be able to use you on the magazine," Miss Baldwin said; "so you go down there just as soon as you can."

There was no need to urge Allie to hurry. She could hardly wait for the afternoon to come. This was indeed glorious news! The very prospect of a position on a magazine thrilled the girl. In Groverbury she had been ambitious to get on the

staff of the school paper, but her other activities, together with her household duties, had prohibited it.

When Allie Dunham appeared at the magazine office and asked for Mr. Blackhurst, the girl at the switchboard was very pleasant.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Miss Baldwin just called and said you were on your way. Mr. Blackhurst asked that you go right up."

This was certainly a beautiful reception. It was so much more cordial than being asked what she wanted to see him about and a dozen other questions.

Mr. Blackhurst, too, was the prince of hosts. As she opened the glass door bearing his name, he arose from his desk and shook hands with her.

"Miss Baldwin told me about you," he said kindly, "and anyone whom Miss Baldwin recommends I feel has a pretty good start."

Allie read in the kindly blue eyes immediate friendship. Mr. Blackhurst was an elderly man with gray hair, a ruddy face, and a sincere, kindly smile. The girl felt she trusted him immediately.

"You want a job, I believe," he began without ceremony. "Is there anything specially you're trained for?" he asked. "Or better," he continued, without awaiting her answer, "what schooling and experience have you had?"

"I just finished one year of high school," Allie

answered, smiling with attempted confidence but knowing in her heart that the reply would carry little weight.

"Just one year," he mused. "Well, I might have known that if I had thought."

"Oh, but I can do a lot of things!" Allie exclaimed, feeling inspired by this kindly soul.

"No doubt—no doubt," replied Mr. Blackhurst. "So Miss Baldwin informed me. She told me all about that apartment you furnished. Said you did a wonderful job of it."

"She did!" Allie exclaimed, moving to the edge of her chair.

"And she said you were chock-full of new and original ideas," the man went on. "Yes, that's what she said—chock-full," he reiterated, smiling. "And she added that you had the ability to carry them out."

"Oh!" interrupted the girl, overjoyed.

"Yes, she did. And that's saying a lot about a fifteen-year-old girl.

"But, my goodness, you wanted to know about the job, didn't you?" he asked, in a teasing tone. "To be sure, the job! That was what you came for.

"Well—" he said slowly, looking at Allie in a kindly way and waiting for a few seconds as though attempting to see what she was thinking about. "Well, I believe we have something that's

just what you would like. No one has had the job before. It's a fresh, new one. Now, what do you think of that?" he asked.

"Why, I think it's all simply wonderful," Allie replied.

She would have thought anything was wonderful that had to do with publishing. She really would not mind wiping dishes here, if that could have anything to do with the magazine.

"It's pretty hard to tell you just what it is now," he said, chuckling. "In fact, I don't know, myself. You see it's this way." Mr. Blackhurst had a habit of talking, then stopping a while in the midst of his thought. "We've had some subscription drives, and the circulation has boosted sky high." He waved his hand in the air to indicate the height of the circulation. "We have more new subscriptions than we ever dreamed of getting. And now, as we grow, we'll have to have more people to take care of things. I had been thinking of hiring an older girl, but I think you'll do just as well as most older ones.

"Starting next Monday, you're to take care of the files," he went on, after a few seconds, "and help out in the circulation department, be general office girl, and, well—you will come in handy all around."

He stopped a minute and beamed at the speechless girl opposite him.

"How does that sound to you?" he asked.

"Why, I just don't know what to say, I'm so happy," Allie gasped.

"We'll start at fifteen a week," he said. "Is that all right?"

"Why, yes," Allie replied. In fact, she would have answered the same thing had he said ten or twenty or thirty, for she really had no conception of what wages one could earn. But fifteen dollars a week did sound substantial.

The rest of the week was spent at home in some fashion or other. No activity, however, could have made it pass fast enough for Allie Dunham. One day the occupants of the house had a picnic on the Charles River, first taking the street car to Dedham and then paddling up the stream in canoes.

As the canoes were pushing off from the pier at Dedham, Miss Baldwin, who had organized the picnic, waved her handkerchief in the air.

"Let's dedicate this outing to The Girl in the Top Flat," she cried, with mock ceremony.

"And here's to the huge success she's going to make on her new job!" Jean Malot cried, raising the top of a thermos bottle which he had filled with water.

They paddled several miles up the river and stopped for supper on the bank, broiling steak over the fire.

Monday morning finally came, and Allie walked over to Beacon Street, the location of her new position.

"Whom did you wish to see?" asked the telephone girl, as Allie passed by her desk, going toward the elevator.

"Oh, I'm working for Mr. Blackhurst now," she announced proudly. What a thrill it was coming down every morning to business. Yes, actually to business!

From nine to ten-thirty Allie occupied herself getting familiar with the *Household Journal* and feeling prouder with the turning of each page. It was hard to realize that she was actually working on a magazine. Perhaps some time she would be able to write for it. Not for quite a while, of course, but some time!

"Oh, I wish I still had those stories," Allie suddenly thought, as she turned to a page containing tales for small children. "But even if I hadn't thrown them all away, they'd be at home, and nobody else could find them."

She had always loved to tell stories and write them. When she was no more than ten years old, she had entertained the Ames children next door with stories. Sometimes they would be those she had read and rehearsed, and at other times they were stories of her own making.

And how she had enjoyed it! Always in the

back of her mind there had been the desire to write. But since there had been no one to talk with about it, the desire had been lost sight of until her first year in high school. Then came Miss Stanton, her English teacher, whom everyone loved. She had commended Allie on her class themes and had encouraged her to write stories.

"Of course, they won't be worth much for a long time," Miss Stanton had said. "But everything worth while takes much practice, and you must not be discouraged."

Suddenly her thoughts were disturbed by the banging of a door. Allie looked up blankly and saw a dark-haired young man enter. He said "good morning" in a rather perfunctory way, and walked straight on through the office.

"Umph!" Allie said to herself. "He looks as though he knows where he's going."

She felt as though she had seen the face before, but could not remember where. The fellow had sparkling brown eyes, brown hair, and was dressed faultlessly in a brown tweed suit.

CHAPTER XVI

AT WORK

EACH morning Allie Dunham left the top flat in the studio house with her head held high, and each evening she returned a little after five o'clock feeling very proud and happy. After a week Miss Baldwin told her of a conversation with Mr. Blackhurst.

"He said you were more than satisfactory," her friend announced, beaming on the girl. "I'm so glad, Allie. I knew you'd make good."

With the coming of each day, Allie's confidence grew. It is true, she worked tremendously hard. There was the whole filing system to learn. She must know where to look for each letter that was wanted.

Most of the correspondence was filed by state, then by city, then by name. Besides taking care of the files, she was subject to the call of the people in the office.

Following Mr. Blackhurst in importance came Ralph Ronaldson, the young man whom Allie had seen enter on her first morning. He was assistant editor.

Miss McGuire, the office manager, and four other women, were on the staff, each of whom Allie liked. Besides these people, there were the shippers. Everyone was helpful to the girl and willing to go out of his way to explain the work. Naturally, in those first hard days there were a great many things Allie needed to have explained.

In fact, at first she felt as though she could never in the wide world learn all that there was to be learned. It was so hard to remember so much. But everyone was considerate, and her questions most of the times found a sympathetic ear.

Even Mr. Ronaldson, in his important way, was kind to Allie. But despite his pleasant manner, the girl did not trust him, for he seemed in some way disingenuous. She could not explain the feeling to herself, but she felt it.

His subtle boasting was quite different from anything Allie Dunham had ever heard. Every time he could connect his trips to Europe with anything in the conversation, he did so.

Each morning Allie made it a point to reach the office ahead of time, and quite frequently she was the first one of the office force to arrive. A few minutes before nine Ralph Ronaldson would burst into the room, all smiles, and, after greeting Allie with a few pleasant words, pass on.

"I wish he'd talk about the weather with some-

one else," Allie thought more than once after the young man had disappeared into the inner office.

By the beginning of the second week, Ralph would follow this already established procedure, then return to Allie's desk and have a chat. Mr. Blackhurst was not accustomed to arriving at the office before half past nine, or, needless to say, his assistant editor would not have found time for his daily talk.

"Let me know if there's anything I can help you with," Ralph would say in his most amiable tone.

But Allie felt she would much rather inquire of Miss McGuire or some of the other girls; in fact, she would have preferred asking the shippers—if they could have answered her queries—to Ralph Ronaldson.

She was thankful that this assistant editor was the only unpleasant person on the staff. Jane McGuire, the office manager, was sharp-faced and near-sighted, but despite her rather forbidding appearance, she was a delightful friend.

At times Allie would make mistakes in her work, and on some occasions the errors would be serious ones. But Miss McGuire was patient and kindly, and always made the corrections in a helpful way.

One day of the second week, Allie found herself on the verge of causing considerable trouble in the office. She remembered that although the

subscribers' letters were all filed according to state and town, there was a different system used on the other correspondence. That which applied to various business contracts, such as printing, advertising, and illustrators' work, was filed under the individual's name without regard to location.

"Will you get me the correspondence on Sobiesky?" Mr. Blackhurst called. "We have to have his illustration lined up for the September issue."

Allie dashed out of his office, looking in the file under Sobiesky. Since he was an illustrator, his correspondence would be filed under his name. She fingered through the folders in the S-O box several times, but found that it was not where it should be.

Kneeling down by the side of the box, she took out each folder in order to make sure that the missing papers were not in the wrong one. Perhaps they had been placed in a file with some other name.

For quite a while Allie searched. She did not alone scour through the S-O box, but exhausted the possibilities of each file in the S section. At last she arose and tried to think of some other possibility.

"Have you found that yet, Allie?" called Mr. Blackhurst. "I'd like to have it as soon as I can."

"No, not yet," she answered.

She did not want to give up the hunt, but she felt that further search was futile. She had looked carefully in all the places in which she thought there was any possibility of finding the Sobiesky material.

"I guess if Mr. Blackhurst talks with Miss Baldwin again he won't say such nice things," she decided mournfully. "I simply must find that correspondence."

She pondered deeply for a while.

"I do believe I saw that some time," she mused. "Yes, I'm pretty sure it was the first week I was here. Well, I suppose it's gone for good."

At the moment when she was almost giving up, Miss McGuire, who had been in the shipping room, returned. She noticed Allie's perturbed expression and went to her.

"What's the matter, Allie?" she asked. "Where did you get that long face?"

When Allie had explained her predicament, Miss McGuire smiled.

"Now, now, just don't worry," she said, patting Allie on the arm. "You probably filed it with the subscribers. We'll look there."

In a minute the Sobiesky file was produced, and at a silent sign from Miss McGuire, Allie rushed it into Mr. Blackhurst's office.

"Oh, there it is," that gentleman said, without

any reference to his long wait. Mr. Blackhurst was always like that, kindly and beneficent.

Miss McGuire was waiting for Allie when she returned.

"Come to my desk, Allie, and I'll tell you what happened, so you won't do it again.

"You filed that under the Kingston, New York, heading. You see, you treated Sobiesky as you would have done had he been a subscriber. You always have to be very careful about that."

"Oh, yes," Allie said, suddenly remembering. "I did that on one of my first days."

Meanwhile Ralph Ronaldson was growing more attentive. His morning visits became a bit longer and his comments during the day more frequent.

"Do you have a lot of friends in Boston, Allie?" he once asked.

"Oh, not very many," she said guardedly. Whenever he spoke she felt on the defensive. Never before had she known anyone whom she felt so uncertain about.

"What do you do with your evenings?" he asked.

"Oh, my, just lots of things!" Allie said, laughing. "I couldn't keep track of them." She did not feel like telling him how most of her evenings were spent—that a few of their friends gathered in the top flat or in Jean Malot's room or in the musicians' studio, and that she looked forward to

those pleasant evenings at the end of each day. Besides, she reasoned, it was none of his concern.

"Do you like the theater?" he asked.

Allie thought he was becoming entirely too personal. She would not mind anyone else asking her questions; but from Ralph Ronaldson they disturbed her.

"Oh, sometimes," she said carelessly, gathering up the papers on her desk and moving with them toward the file. She wished he would go away, but she felt she could not be impolite to him.

"How would you like to go sometime?" he asked.

"Why, I do go every now and then," Allie answered, purposely misunderstanding his question. "How delightful it would be," she mused, "if he were someone I liked. It would be heavenly to have some nice person take me to a show. But with Ralph Ronaldson, it's different. He's obnoxious."

Yet the girl could not tell just what there was about him that she so disliked.

"Someone like Jean Malot—only younger—how grand that would be!" But she supposed there would not be another person in the world as nice as Jean Malot, except perhaps Miss Baldwin. But then that was different. She was quite sure there was no other man as nice as he.

By this time Allie had reached the other side

of the file and had started to open the top drawer. Ralph walked over, and, drawing her hand away from the knob, opened the drawer for her. Then he smiled down at her, standing aside while she pulled out a folder.

"Efficient little worker!" he exclaimed.

As she passed to the next drawer, he did the same thing, and in addition, squeezed her hand. Allie drew it quickly from him. The very idea! He made her furious. But she must not show it. She must act as though she had not noticed it.

"Allie," he said suddenly, "our hiking club is giving a picnic next Saturday. Would you like to go along?"

She looked at him, amazed. Of course she would not like to go along! But it would never do to tell him so.

"Why—a—I can't," she answered, somewhat nervously. She hardly knew what to say. But uppermost in her mind was the fact that she disliked Ralph Ronaldson and disliked him heartily. She would rather stay at home the whole week-end and paint furniture or sew curtains or clean house for Miss Baldwin; in fact, she would prefer almost anything rather than go with this hateful man.

But Ralph Ronaldson was not to be put off easily.

"What do you mean by 'you can't'?" he asked rather gruffly.

"Why—a—Dad has made some other arrangements," she prevaricated. "He planned for us to visit one of his friends."

"Well, do you have to go with him?" Ralph demanded in an almost surly voice.

"No, I don't have to," Allie confessed uneasily. "But I told him I would, so of course, I will."

"Don't you want to go on the picnic with me?" Ralph asked pointedly, his tone no longer friendly, but challenging.

At this question, Allie fumbled through the papers in the file and her mind flew into a turmoil. She disliked deliberately telling an untruth, and yet she could not be absolutely tactless. She wanted to cry: "No, I don't want to go with you! I hate you!" But that, of course, would never do.

"Now that's not fair," she laughed. She tried to make her voice sound gay, and even hilarious, so that he would not guess the truth. But evidently she did not succeed.

"Now look here, Allie!" he exclaimed as the color rose in his face. "I'm not used to having people say 'no' to me. And as far as you're having a date with your father is concerned, I don't believe it. And," he continued deliberately after a

second of silence, "I might say that it won't help you any to take this attitude toward me."

"Why, why, what——" she started.

"It means just this," he interrupted menacingly. "Your job won't be worth two cents here."

Allie looked up from the file. He could not talk like this to her! She would tell him that he could keep his threats to himself! She was not afraid of him. She was working for Mr. Blackhurst, not for him. The very idea!

But he had walked away, slamming the door as he disappeared into the shipping room.

CHAPTER XVII

BUDDING AMBITION

ALLIE DUNHAM's indignation at Ralph Ronaldson's speech did not last long. Slowly, she began to wonder if he really could do some harm and if there was danger of losing her place in the magazine office.

"I was never so in love with anything in my life before," Allie decided. "I simply can't lose it! And I won't!"

Barricaded within the walls of her own confidence, her assurance for a time returned. But as the days rolled on and Ralph's manner became more and more unbearable, she grew worried.

"I wonder if something really could happen," she pondered. "I'd hate to lose this place, for I really do love the work. Then, we do need the money so!" she thought. "Oh, dear, poor Dad didn't get the order for that magazine cover he wanted. I wish he could get more work and I wish he could sell some of his paintings. What made that old George Sunwich go away! He might have helped some!" Then her thoughts

wandered gloomily to Jackson Tobet and her father's losses in oil.

Allie's worry, however, in no way impaired her efficiency. She was determined to make her work satisfactory, so that if Ralph Ronaldson was cad enough to try to have her discharged her record would foil his plans.

"I wouldn't be surprised at anything he'd do," she muttered.

"Don't worry about that fellow, Allie," Miss McGuire said one day, having noticed the surly manner in which Ralph treated Allie. "He high-hats everybody who won't dance to his tune."

As Allie became more and more absorbed in the work, she pondered over the different ways in which she could prove her worth. One day, when she was looking through the supplies, she came upon several piles of old *Journals*. Suddenly an idea came.

"I know what I'll do!" Allie exclaimed aloud. "I'll take the back numbers of the *Journal* home and study them in the evenings."

"Ha! Ha!" a voice behind her laughed. She turned and saw Mike, the head shipper.

"Did you hear what I said?" Allie demanded.

"You bet I did," he answered good-naturedly. "If I were you, I'd save myself the trouble. No use doin' that," he advised.

"Well, I should say there is," Allie replied spiritedly.

"What for?" he asked.

"What for?" Allie repeated. "Why, to learn all about them, of course."

"Then what?" Mike inquired, laughing.

What silly questions he could ask! But when she stopped to think, it was a little hazy in her mind, too. What use would she make of the knowledge?

"I'll find a use for it, all right; don't you worry about that," Allie replied, smiling. "You'll see some time," she added confidently.

As Allie stacked up the magazines to take home, the shipper's question came back to her. What, indeed, would she do with the knowledge?

"I guess when you eat your meals every day you don't know where the food's going to, either," she decided. "But it helps build you up, and, anyway, you know it's good for you. I suppose that's the way with all learning."

Allie's evenings were no longer spent with the group from the house. If friends were in her father's room, she would close her own door and study over the contents of the various issues of the *Household Journal*.

Miss Baldwin helped the girl along greatly.

"You'd better start out systematically," she advised. "Take the oldest *Journal* you have, say

a year back, then, after you've run through them all more or less quickly, start over again and make a list of the kinds of contents. And try to notice, Allie, in what way the policy is changing and as the number of pages grow, see what added material they are using."

Several evenings Miss Baldwin remained with Allie and guided her study, making fruitful suggestions.

At the end of several weeks, on the basis of her study, Allie decided that the *Journal* could very well use more fairy stories. Just before Christmas the preceding year, several of them had appeared, but since then, there had been none.

"That's a splendid idea," Miss Baldwin said. "Now you'll want to read very carefully those already printed, see how long they are, and of what type, generally. Then let's see what you can write."

"Will you look over my story?" Allie asked, fired with enthusiasm.

"I certainly will," her friend said. "I'd love to have you show that Ralph Ronaldson person that he doesn't know so much after all. See if he doesn't change his tune when he sees you budding out as an author."

Nights of frenzied activity followed. Many times the girl worked steadily from seven until eleven, and she would have written longer except

that her father insisted on her retiring at that time.

"Remember, my dear, you've lost eight pounds this summer. You can't be careless about your health. You must get enough sleep."

These steady evenings of work in no way injured Allie, but, if anything, they increased her energy. Under Miss Baldwin's capable direction, she forged right ahead in her story-writing.

"When you get through criticizing them," Allie said one evening, "I feel as though there wasn't anything left. But I know it does me a lot of good. It's just what I need."

"Do you feel it helps you?" Miss Baldwin asked.

"I should say it does! Do you know what I'd like to do? I'd like to get this one finished and take it to Mr. Blackhurst. Do you think he'd mind?" Allie's story on brownies for small children had been worked over a great deal, and she was anxious to get the editor's opinion of it.

"By all means, do so," Miss Baldwin agreed. "If you get the next draft finished this evening, run down and let me see it. Maybe you can show it to him to-morrow."

It was about eleven o'clock that evening when Allie tiptoed down the stairs to Miss Baldwin's room. If there was no light, she would know her friend was asleep and would not disturb her.

"Well, you little night owl!" Miss Baldwin greeted her, on opening the door before Allie had a chance to knock. "I heard the stairs creak, and something told me it was you. Is your story finished?"

"Every bit of it," Allie replied cheerfully. "But now if you think it isn't any good, just tell me and I won't show it to Mr. Blackhurst."

"You won't mind?" Miss Baldwin had a way of teasing, so that many times Allie was not positive whether she was serious or not.

"Not one bit!" Allie exclaimed, smiling as though she really would not care. "May I?" Allie asked pleadingly, reaching toward an open candy box on the table.

"The whole top layer is yours," Miss Baldwin said. "Anyone who works that hard, deserves candy."

Allie walked to the window and watched the blinking lights while her critic reread the story. The girl was eager for the verdict, and every few minutes she would glance about to see how many pages were still to be read.

"That's simply corking!" Miss Baldwin exclaimed, placing the last sheet on the table and walking to the window to Allie's side. "You're nothing less than an undiscovered genius, Allie Dunham! I insist that's what you are."

"Then should I take it to Mr. Blackhurst?" Allie asked.

"You certainly should," Miss Baldwin said emphatically. "And don't let that Ralph Ronaldson see it first. He should have done something about those other two stories you showed him."

"I think he still has them on his desk," Allie replied.

"That's a fine place for them. Why didn't he show them to Mr. Blackhurst? Just because he wants to be horrid to you," the young woman said, answering her own question.

The next morning Allie had the editor's desk shined up in unusual style. The sun beaming on the glass top reflected the glory in Allie's young face.

"He'll see that the first thing," Allie decided, as she moved his regular correspondence to one side, and his memorandums to the other side, placing her own story carefully in the center of his desk.

At half-past nine Mr. Blackhurst entered. He greeted the office force with a smile, took off his hat, and walked into his own office. Allie was stamping a large stack of envelopes, but she had a tremendous lot of trouble with them. Her hands were so nervous that the stamp either landed part way off the envelope or too near the center. Never before had she experienced such difficulty.

My, what was the matter with the old stamps, anyway? And what an endless pile of letters that was! Allie almost persuaded herself that after a certain number of the letters had been stamped, the stamps detached themselves and the letters miraculously replaced themselves in the original pile.

Finally, there came a ring from the inner office. It was meant for Allie. In a flurry, the girl burst into the editor's office, her eyes shining with eagerness.

What would he say? Would he like her story? He must have read it by this time!

CHAPTER XVIII

MISHAP AND DISCOVERY

ALLIE DUNHAM, to her great dismay, saw papers in confusion spread all over Mr. Blackhurst's desk. Instead of a look of commendation, there was only a frown on his face, as he stood behind the desk.

"Where in the world did you put that Sobiesky file, Allie?" he asked in a troubled voice. "I was working with that here yesterday afternoon."

"I—I filed that last night," Allie replied. "You had it in the file basket."

"Oh, is that where it is!" he exclaimed, sitting down and taking a deep breath. "I didn't know I put it in the file basket. I looked through everything on this desk."

"I'll get it right away," Allie offered, leaving the office.

"He didn't even see my story!" the girl moaned, as she bent over the file. "He didn't even look at it. I'm simply dying to know what he thinks of it."

Despite her anxiety, she disliked bringing it to his attention when he was busy with other mat-

ters. He might react unfavorably if he were in a hurry.

In two seconds Allie had returned with the desired file, but as she turned to leave the office, Mr. Blackhurst called to her.

"Is this your story, Allie?" he asked, fishing it from beneath the scattered papers. "Did you write it?"

"A—yes, sir," Allie stammered.

"Well, you don't say!" he muttered, stroking his chin and looking thoughtful. Allie, standing in front of his desk, gripped its corner until the varnish was in danger of coming off.

"I just had a chance to glance over it hastily," the editor said, "but it looks as though it were just the kind of stuff we want. Is this the first story you've written?" he asked.

"Well, no," she said. "I used to write them at home. I don't know where they are. But I did some this summer, too."

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Where are they?"

"Why, Mr. Ronaldson has them," Allie replied.

"Ronaldson has!" Mr. Blackhurst exclaimed. "Why didn't he show them to me? Call him in here," he demanded all in one breath.

In a second the assistant editor appeared at the door, wearing his brown tweed suit and a suave smile.

"What happened to Allie Dunham's stories,

Ronaldson? Why didn't you say anything about them?" Mr. Blackhurst spoke more sternly than Allie had ever heard him speak before.

"Oh, I haven't got to them yet," he replied easily. Nothing ever seemed to trouble Ralph Ronaldson.

"The girl showed me one this morning that she wrote, and it looks like the real thing," the editor went on.

As Mr. Blackhurst looked down at Allie's manuscript, Ralph scowled at the girl, as much as to say, "I'll get you into trouble for this. See if I don't."

Allie merely wrinkled her nose at him, then looked away.

"All right, Ronaldson," Mr. Blackhurst said, dismissing him.

"If this is as good as it looks at first glance," he said pleasantly to Allie, "we'll publish it."

Then, as he looked down at his desk again, Allie walked toward the door.

"Oh, just a minute," he called. "If you're turning out to be as valuable as all this," he added, "we'll have to see what we can do about an increase in salary."

Allie joyfully flew about her work. A raise! And so soon! She could hardly wait until she could tell her father. And Miss Baldwin! And Jean Malot! They would all be so glad, too.

So happy was Allie over the prospect of an increase in salary that the displeasure which she had incurred about the story, together with Ralph Ronaldson's former anger, was almost forgotten. The young man, however, took occasion to remind her as often as possible.

One day he asked Allie to bring him the drawer of subscribers' stencils for upper New York.

"Where are they?" Allie asked. In fact, she did not know what stencils were, never having had occasion to use them before.

"They're over in the corner. Get one of the girls to show you," he snarled, very much annoyed.

Miss McGuire, hearing the conversation, quietly motioned to Allie and led her over to the place where the drawers of stencils were kept.

"What are they?" Allie inquired. She had learned long ago that the best way to get information was to ask questions.

"Never make believe you know something when you don't," Mr. Blackhurst had advised her when Allie first entered the office. "You'll never learn that way. Better to ask too many questions than not enough."

Miss McGuire, in her helpful way, explained.

"They make stencils on a typewriter from which the ribbon has been removed," the office manager began. "The lettering is cut into the card, and afterward when we want to use it, we run the

cards through the stencil machine. Then the ink prints through the cut letters, making it look something like typewriting. See?"

Allie did not understand, but rather than take any more time, she replied:

"Oh, yes."

After finding the drawer for upper New York, she turned and hurried away so as not to keep Ralph waiting any longer. He fussed enough over imaginary things without her giving him reason for real faultfinding.

One of the large ledgers was on the floor at the right side of Ralph's chair, and as Allie rushed over, intending to place the drawer before him on the desk, she stumbled over the ledger. Out flew the stencil cards in all directions, several flying past Ralph's nose.

"Oh, my!" Allie gasped in confusion, as the tin drawer banged against the mahogany desk and fell to the floor.

The noise attracted everyone in the room, and all stopped their work to gaze over at the distracted girl and the angry assistant editor.

"That's a fine mess!" he said, sitting perfectly still with hands on hips, not even offering to help gather up the stencils. Allie glanced at him enough to see the narrow, squinted eyes and the contempt written in them.

"If you didn't have that old book there——" Allie cried.

"That's enough," he interrupted shortly. His dignity could not bear to be challenged, and he seemed always to expect courtesy from others, while his treatment of them depended entirely on his humor.

Allie collected the cards from his desk and from the floor, placing them in their drawer.

"Get them in order first," he growled. "And get those out of the waste basket."

"What a crab!" Allie muttered under her breath. If this fellow ever became editor, she thought, the magazine certainly would go on the rocks.

Her meditations on the future of the magazine were interrupted by the voice of Ralph Ronaldson as he rose from his chair.

"Be sure to be back by twelve-thirty to-day," he said to Allie, walking toward the hat rack.

"Yes," the girl answered.

She recalled the fact that she had not seen Mr. Blackhurst that morning. He had probably started on his vacation, as he had suggested he might. A few of the girls were away, too. It was the rule to have someone there at all times.

At half-past eleven Allie slipped on her hat and went out. She felt like walking and decided to find a different place for lunch. Frequently she

brought sandwiches along, but that morning she had not had time to fix them.

Walking down Beacon Street to Tremont Street, she mingled with the crowd, making her way part of the time in the street to make progress. Suddenly she thought of the cafeteria where she had worked for a day. It would be fun to go there, and it was not too far.

Entering the revolving door this time was a joy. She no longer felt hesitant or fretful, but spoke cordially to the cashier and to the manager who stood near by.

"I guess the upsetting of that old box upset me too," Allie decided, as she ordered toast and tea. Her hunger had entirely disappeared.

She did not mind the clattering of dishes now, since she was not in the midst of them. Sitting near the counter, she smiled as she heard the order, "Two on a raft," thinking of her experience not many months before.

"I remember now," she mused as she munched the toast. "That morning while I was waiting here I saw Ralph Ronaldson come in for his breakfast. I knew I had seen him some place before."

Walking back over Tremont Street there were more crowds than ever. People on their lunch hour, trying to fit in a few minutes for purchases, rushed about, weaving in and out of the pedes-

trians, watching their chance to gain a few feet.

As Allie neared the corner of Temple Place she had to step off the sidewalk to escape running into a big fellow who was approaching. Something about the fellow's eyes made Allie stop short, and as he passed by, she stared with open mouth.

She would follow him. She must know if her surmise was right. With a few running steps along the street, she had passed the tall fellow. Then on looking back full in his face, she uttered a cry.

"Oh, you swindler!" she shrieked, almost beside herself with amazement and anger. "So you came to Boston with our money! You're Jackson Tobet—that's who you are! And I'm going to turn you over to——"

But the oil swindler was not interested in Allie's plans for him. The instant he realized the import of her words, he immediately swung about, rushed down Temple Place like mad, and disappeared in the crowd.

CHAPTER XIX

TROUBLED WATERS

After a futile chase, Allie Dunham leaned against a show window, breathless. She had actually found Jackson Tobet! But instead of quietly motioning to a policeman, she had upbraided the scoundrel, made a scene, and let him slip through her fingers!

"Nobody with a grain of sense would have done as I did," moaned Allie. "It was so sudden, though, I couldn't seem to think of anything else."

Mournfully, she retraced her steps and walked up Tremont Street, but instead of returning to the office of the *Household Journal,* she hurried to her home.

"I must tell my father," she decided. "Maybe he can do something."

It was a still more breathless girl who unlocked the front door and rushed up the steps.

"Well, if it isn't Allie!" Jean Malot cried, as he glanced through his opened door. "Come right in. Your dad's here," Jean went on.

For some weeks Paul Dunham had been work-

ing in his friend's studio where the light was an improvement over his own.

"Kindred souls always make me work better, anyway," Jean had insisted.

Somewhat incoherently Allie told of her meeting with Jackson Tobet.

Paul Dunham arose in his excitement, but Jean, as quickly as the girl had finished her story, exclaimed:

"Come on! We'll go right over to Police Station Three. It's only a little way."

At the police station Paul Dunham spoke to the police captain, gave him the details of the swindle and the description of Jackson Tobet. During these few minutes, Jean talked in a low tone to Allie.

"I'm glad that happened now," he said. "It will give your father something to think of. His wrist gave out altogether this morning, and he was terribly discouraged. I'm trying to have him rest it thoroughly until it's well."

"If I just hadn't been so stupid about it," Allie complained. "Anybody with a grain of sense would have known enough to call a policeman. But goodness," the girl exclaimed, suddenly remembering the office and her promise to return by half-past twelve, "I'll have to rush away this very minute."

After adding her bit to the description of Jack-

son Tobet, Allie left the police station and almost ran over to Beacon Street. When she entered the office her face shone not alone from perspiration. Excitement and adventure were written in her eyes, and as she tossed her hat on the hook and started filing the letters on her desk she realized that she was alone in the office.

"It's almost half-past one!" she exclaimed, glancing at the clock on the wall. "But it seems as though a whole day had been crowded into this noon time. I do hope they catch that old scoundrel. He makes me furious!"

With no clew except a brown suit to follow, however, there was very little chance of finding the fugitive. An automobile license number, for instance, would have given a wider opportunity for success.

"We'll do everything we can," the police captain had said, but, of course, as Jean Malot had suggested, the police had hundreds of other cases to spend their time on, too, so that this one was merely part of their daily routine.

"Poor Dad with his wrist," thought the girl. She could picture him sitting by the window with that helpless, disconsolate expression, devoid of hope. It was so hard to say anything in a case like that. Anything one said sounded flat and insincere. The doctor in Groverbury had warned

him that he would have to rest the arm thoroughly until it was entirely well.

"But it seems that as soon as it gets well and he uses his wrist, all the resting hasn't done any good. Then he has to start resting it all over again.

"Well, even if he can't paint for a while," Allie mused, "I have a job. My, but it's grand to be bringing home fifteen dollars every week. It isn't much, but it certainly helps a lot. And I may get that raise soon."

At that moment the phone rang. It was a long, insistent ring such as announced a long distance call.

"Is Mr. Blackhurst there?" asked a man's deep voice.

A series of questions and answers followed: Did he leave any word for the Cartright printers? When would he return?

In the midst of the conversation Ralph Ronaldson burst into the office.

"Who is that? Is that Cartright?" he demanded.

He snatched the phone from the girl and talked in hurried tones.

"Ronaldson speaking—No, Mr. Blackhurst isn't here; went on his vacation to-day. But he asked me to handle it—— What? You called earlier? There was someone here all through the

day—— At one o'clock? Well, that's odd—— I'll get that arranged and call you back inside of half an hour."

Ralph slammed the receiver into place and glared across the office at Allie.

"I'll attend to you later," he growled. "They've been trying to get us for the last hour."

He disappeared into the editor's office, procured the information for the printer, and after a few minutes of intense application and figuring called for long distance. Satisfactory arrangements were evidently made, for Allie followed the conversation closely. It seemed as though more information was necessary before the printing of the next *Household Journal* could go ahead, and every minute was valuable. The hour's delay at this crucial point had almost been fatal.

Again Ralph slammed the receiver into place, but this time, instead of merely glaring at the girl, he walked over to where she was sitting at her desk.

"What time did you get back to-day?" he demanded. His eyes looked narrow and insolent.

"Why, I was a little late," Allie began. "You know when I was walking down Tremont——"

"I don't care where you were walking," he interrupted viciously, snapping his fingers almost in her face. "I told you to be back here at twelve-thirty. And you weren't here!"

"But I saw the man who ran away with our money!" Allie gasped, attempting to explain. "And of course——"

Again the angry assistant editor interrupted.

"I told you I didn't care who you saw," Ralph roared, his tone becoming more offensive each time he spoke. Then his eyes narrowed still more and he slammed his fist down on the corner of her desk.

"I've had about enough of your insolence," he said deliberately. "You're going to have your walking papers right now."

With open mouth and blazing eyes Allie stared at him.

"Oh, you can't do that! You won't do that! No—no—no!"

As the realization came with its full force, the girl could hold up no longer. She buried her head in her arms and cried aloud.

CHAPTER XX

AN ENEMY

WHILE Allie Dunham wept, her anger at Ralph grew steadily more intense.

To be discharged just at this time when her father most needed the money. To have to leave this wonderful position where she was so happy, where the only black cloud on the horizon was this miserable cad, Ralph Ronaldson. She could never bear to tell her father. And Miss Baldwin! To confess that she had not made good, had failed despite all the chance she had! No one would ever again have faith in her. And certainly Miss Baldwin wouldn't. Her reputation would be utterly ruined—forever.

The more Allie thought the more she sobbed, but gradually, she became quiet. Ralph, disliking a scene, had walked into the editor's office.

Slowly Miss McGuire's words floated through Allie's mind.

"Once Ralph Ronaldson says something, a team of horses couldn't get him to change it," she had said.

And now its significance forced itself on the

girl. He had discharged her, and he meant it. No matter what she said, he would not go back on his word. This, then, was the culmination of her refusal to accompany him on the Saturday's picnic.

"If I had only known," she moaned, "I would have gone to ten miserable picnics rather than have such a thing as this happen! I would have gone to a hundred!"

She was sitting listlessly at her desk as Ralph came out of the editor's office.

"You might as well stay until this evening," he said quietly, "so you can get that pile of letters filed."

At this particular moment, Allie's fury blazed forth. It was not the kind of fury that had made her cry, but an indignant, almost violent anger.

She stood up and faced the man.

"Is that so!" she cried. "I'll tell you right now that I'm not only going to stay until this evening, but until the next evening too. You haven't any right to fire me, and I'm not going to be fired. Mr. Blackhurst is the only one who can fire me!"

Ralph calmly looked at the girl, amazed at her independence. Could this be the same girl who had wept so bitterly just a few minutes before?

"You've been bullying me around long enough

just because I wouldn't go with you on your old picnic——"

"Now that's enough from you!" he interrupted, his calm amazement changing to anger. "You're through here. And just remember this—to-day's your last day. And it'll be your last day no matter how much you talk. So you can just keep that sauciness to yourself."

"This is not my last day," Allie insisted vehemently, "no more than it's your last day. You can't fire me! I won't be fired!"

As Allie talked on she was almost as much amazed at her stand as Ralph was. Seldom had she been placed in such a position. Life for the most part had been so peaceful in Groverbury.

"I told you that was enough!" Ralph roared. "Get on your hat and coat and go this very minute, and don't——"

"Who's going this very minute?" Mr. Blackhurst had quietly entered the outer door and confronted his assistant editor. "Who's going?" he repeated, as Allie and Ralph turned and stared at him in astonishment.

The assistant editor was so dumbfounded that he was hardly capable of answering.

"Why, I had to tell Allie that she'd have to go," he explained. "She broke the last straw this noon. I asked her especially to get back by twelve-thirty because I expected Cartright to call. Here

he tried for an hour or more, and nobody was here."

"Where were you, Ronaldson?" Mr. Blackhurst asked quickly.

"I had a luncheon engagement at the Parker House with Briggs, our new illustrator," he said.

"What could Allie have done if she had been here when Cartright called?" the editor demanded.

"Oh, called me at the Parker House, of course," the young fellow replied. "Naturally," he added, smiling slightly and assuming his old manner of assurance, "this wasn't the only reason. It's her general inefficiency."

Without comment, Mr. Blackhurst quickly looked at his watch, then went to the phone and called a number.

"Hello, Clara?" he said when he was connected. "I hope you don't mind taking that evening train. Something unexpected has come up and I'll have to stay a while—— Oh, don't mind that—— I'll telegraph them we'll be there later." He arose slowly from the desk.

"When there's any firing to be done around here, Ronaldson, I'll do it," he said coldly. Then he walked toward his own office.

"I want to talk to you a few minutes, Allie," he said, holding the door open for her. "It's a

good thing I forgot that briefcase and came back for it," he commented, as he sat down.

"I've noticed for quite a while that you and Ronaldson didn't get along very well," he began. "I know he frequently has rather queer likes and dislikes, but we won't go into that."

As Allie remained standing he motioned her to a seat.

"It just occurred to me that while I'm on my vacation you might as well get started on that settlement work. I've had it in mind a long while.

"I'm just wondering," he continued, "whether you could do it. Several months ago we had some interviews with social service workers. I remember you mentioned having read them. Now, what I want you to do is to study those over carefully again, then go down in that section of the city and get some interviews from the people who live there. In that way we get the material from another angle."

"I'd love to try it," Allie said. But her tone was rather subdued, and did not sound confident.

"I know how that strikes you," Mr. Blackhurst said, smiling. "It sounds like a pretty big order for a young girl, doesn't it? But all I want you to do is to get the interviews, take notes on them, then I'll help you whip them into shape. You won't have to write them finally. I'll do that, for

we shall make these articles an important feature of the magazine for several months after the appearance of the first one. For that reason, too, I want you to make your notes accurate; and make them full, for I can eliminate more easily than I can pad out."

With Mr. Blackhurst's kindly manner confronting her, anything seemed possible. And at this moment, although Allie had little idea of what she was actually going to do or how she would get it done, she felt that, somehow, she would be able to carry it through.

"I think you ought to spend a good deal of time down there for a week," he said. "Talk to a lot of different people and get different viewpoints. But first of all, study over those articles carefully, so you'll know what you're going after. Think you can do it?"

"Why, yes, I'm pretty sure I can," Allie replied, trying to appear confident.

"And I'll be back in a couple of weeks," Mr. Blackhurst said, gathering up his briefcase and hat. "You'd better try to get most of your filing done in the morning, and then start out."

He walked over to the desk of his assistant editor, and in a few minutes, was gone.

Allie went gayly about her work. She caught her finger in one of the file drawers when she closed it. It hurt for a moment, but she soon

forgot it. She did not mind anything now, for the whole world was bright again. In a short time the other girls had returned and the office was again buzzing with activity.

"What's the matter, Allie?" Miss McGuire asked, seeing Allie's reddened eyes.

"Oh, I shut the file drawer on my finger," the girl answered. Some other time she would tell her about it, but not now.

CHAPTER XXI

TRYING HER WINGS

"WHAT, Allie, an assignment already?" asked the astonished Miss Baldwin when Allie Dunham told her about the settlement work. "Mr. Blackhurst must have thought very highly of your story if he's set you already to writing. Why, it's remarkable!"

"I'm not going to do the writing, exactly," Allie corrected her. "You see," she explained, "I'm to get the interviews and then Mr. Blackhurst is to do most of the writing."

"Oh, I see," her friend responded. "But even then, it's very remarkable."

"I'm going to love it!" Allie chirped.

"Tell me," Miss Baldwin asked suddenly, looking very serious, "have you ever done any interviewing?"

"No, I haven't," Allie confessed, in an equally sober tone.

"Well, do you know how to go about it?" her friend asked.

"Not exactly," Allie replied. This was the problem that had been worrying her all along,

but she felt that somehow it would work itself out.

"My dear, when I was your age," Miss Baldwin said, smiling, "I didn't know what the word interview meant, let alone trying to do it. But really, you're the spunkiest little creature I've ever seen, and when those big violet eyes of yours get determined and you decide to do something, you see that you do it."

It was this kind of encouragement from her friends that Allie Dunham so prized. When she felt as though she could go no further, she thought of their faith in her and was immediately revived.

"But I mustn't praise you so much," Miss Baldwin added, "even though I do feel like doing it."

"Well, you must tell me how to interview," Allie said, fearful lest they forget that.

"Now the first, most important thing, Allie," Miss Baldwin began, "is to know what you're going after. You must line up in your mind the questions you're going to ask, so that you can start the people to talking."

"What if they talk about something else?" the girl asked.

"That's just where you must use tact," Miss Baldwin said. "Bring them back to the subject in such a way so that they won't notice it. Just as you did with me a few minutes ago," Miss Baldwin laughed. "You have the knack already."

Sitting at Miss Baldwin's desk with pencil and paper, Allie and her instructor made an outline of the proposed article, and then carefully made out the questions that Allie was to keep in mind.

"Now if you can arrange it," Miss Baldwin advised, "it would be better, far better, to make your notes after you have talked with the person, not," she cautioned, "while you are on the scene. It will be hard to remember at first."

The next day Allie arrived at the office unusually early in order to finish the filing as soon as possible. She was eager to get started on the interview work. But along with the eagerness was a feeling of apprehension.

"Well, I never did any filing before, and I learned that," she mused. "So I suppose I can learn to interview people, too."

A short time before eleven, Allie walked over to the corner and put on her hat.

"Where are you going, Allie?" Ralph demanded, with an air of authority.

"Mr. Blackhurst said I should go out and get some interviews in the settlement district," Allie replied in as civil a tone as she could command. She remembered suddenly that the editor had left for his vacation after giving her the interview instructions, and perhaps in his short talk with his assistant had not mentioned it.

"What about your filing?" he asked.

"I got here early and have finished that," she said.

"Go ahead, then," he responded, probably realizing that he could not interfere with the editor's instructions. The preceding day had taught him that.

Early in the morning Allie had told Miss McGuire of her plans. Immediately the office manager made some valuable suggestions. She suggested where to begin and what streets to cover.

"And take this shorthand notebook along," she added. "You'll find it very helpful to keep all your notes in one book instead of on different papers."

"Is it a shorthand book?" Allie asked doubtfully.

"Yes," Miss McGuire answered, smiling. "But that doesn't keep you from writing long hand in it."

Walking down to the tenement district, Allie's mind was working fast. She must make good on this assignment. If Mr. Blackhurst saw that she could do this successfully, he would no doubt give her more things of a like nature. And if she practiced hard, she might later on be able to write up the interviews herself, with the help, at first, of Miss Baldwin. The prospect was glorious. If only she could make good!

Suddenly Allie's eyes opened wide. There was a small shop named "The Bon Ton Hat Shoppe." It brought memories of that morning in the early summer when she had tried to get work in Groverbury, when Miss Bodkins had been trying to fit the stout woman with a small, close-fitting felt hat, and of her kindliness toward Allie.

With it came the thought of Amy and Babs and their summer trips. She was perfectly sure that no one could be having such an interesting summer as she, Allie Dunham, was.

"I must write to them," she decided. "Goodness, I haven't written to Mrs. Ames since that first postal card that we had reached Boston. I must write her a real letter."

Her meditations carried her to the street where she was to get her first interview.

"Just walk up to the door, knock, and ask to see the mother," Miss Baldwin had instructed her.

Climbing to the second flight, Allie saw signs of life. She heard a child crying and saw two youngsters toddling about the darkened hall. Walking farther, she came upon an open door through which was visible a short woman offering a bottle to a baby in a high chair.

"I wonder if you could spare me a few minutes?" Allie asked, smiling pleasantly.

"Yes, come in," the woman said pleasantly, no

doubt glad to see the radiant young face of the girl.

By this time the two little tots who had been adventuring through the hall approached the doorway, and stopped to gaze at Allie with a great deal of diffidence.

After a short time Allie was successful in getting the woman's reaction toward the summer camps, how they had helped her older children, the number of weeks they had been gone, how they had gained in weight, and other topics.

"You'll have to excuse me now. It's time to get dinner," the woman said, as Allie continued with her questions, so the young interviewer left.

Having dusted off the lower steps with her handkerchief, Allie sat down to make her notes. She felt she would not forget anything of the conversation, but Miss Baldwin's warning came back to her.

"Put things down as soon as you can," she had advised.

There resulted several closely written pages, and as Allie arose to go, she realized that she was very hungry. She might as well find a place to eat before she went further.

At the end of the next block, she found a small lunch room, took a seat by the door, and ordered a plate of baked beans and a cup of tea.

Looking out the window, she ate her lunch

slowly, turning over in her mind the events of the last few days. One excitement after another seemed to have come, and as a climax she was given this marvelous assignment. What was more, she was making good at it!

The next instant her meditations ceased, for she happened to glance at the man who was walking out the door. It was that same brown suit, that same tall figure, that she had seen on Tremont Street!

CHAPTER XXII

DETECTIVE WORK

EXPERIENCE had taught Allie Dunham to be cautious. If this man was Jackson Tobet, she must follow him and determine where he lived. But what if he should turn and see her? He had rather shifty eyes, she had noticed, the kind one thought of as darting around in all directions.

She paid her check at the counter, then walked slowly down the street in the direction which Jackson Tobet had taken. He had a deliberate way of walking, and he threw his shoulders back in such a fine manner that from the rear one might think of him as an athlete.

"It's queer that his eyes didn't look shifty when he walked around Groverbury," Allie reasoned. "Maybe he wasn't really dishonest then; maybe he thought his wells were good."

Then came the second thought. Perhaps this was not after all the same man! But his flight on Tremont Street had been definite acknowledgment of his guilt. There was no doubt at all. She must follow him and see where he lived. To let

him slip through her fingers once was enough. She would not do it again.

Her detective work led her back past the house where she had had the interview.

"Guess I'll have to let that go for a while," she decided. "Catching this old scoundrel is more important than interviews just now. If I were only sure that I could!"

After two blocks the man turned and followed a cross street to the right. Allie walked along, her heart beating fast. She was becoming a bit more nervous each minute.

"Oh, he's gone!" the girl moaned, as she turned the corner and saw no one in sight. All along she had been fearful that something like this would happen, but she knew of nothing else to do that would be safe, for there was no police officer in sight.

She looked frantically up and down the street, but could see no one. Then, spying two small shops near the corner, she felt relieved. Perhaps he had entered one of them. She would wait.

Crossing to the other side, she sat down on the steps of a tenement house and put her notebook on her knees, pretending to be looking over its pages. Then came another idea. She must jot down the direction and number of blocks from the lunch room, or she would be at a loss to tell any-

one. It was all she could do to remember these few turns.

After a few minutes of anxiety, she saw three men come out of the confectionery store directly opposite, among them being Jackson Tobet. She bent her head over her notebook, as though studying it intently. She was dressed differently than when he had seen her before, and he would probably not give her a second glance.

"I'd better let them get a little farther on," she mused. "Just so I can keep them in sight. Goodness knows what would happen if they knew I was following."

But the three men were too preoccupied to notice anything around them. They were conversing in an excited fashion, and it seemed that Jackson Tobet was more or less guiding the talk, for while he looked straight ahead, the other two men looked up at him occasionally.

They were almost a half block away now, and Allie quickened her pace, fearful that they might turn from the street and she would lose them. Even at that distance she could not know just which house they would enter, if they should do so. She must shorten the distance between them.

Her heart was beating now as though she had run for miles, and she could feel her face becoming hotter every minute. By this time, plans were shaping themselves in her mind.

"I'll follow them until I find where they go," she determined, "then I'll go and find a policeman."

She was closer to the men now, and felt that there was less chance of their getting away. After another block, they entered an old office building. Allie felt that nothing could stop her now, and she walked in soon after them.

With no idea of what to do or say, she felt that if she did get into a tight corner, there would be some way out. She would trust that things would work out.

Since the building had only three floors, and was rather small, there would be little difficulty in finding them. She walked up the dark stairs which ascended next to the elevator. By the moving of the ropes in the shaft, she knew that the elevator was running. Probably it carried the three men.

Allie tried to think of a plan, but it was impossible. Here she was in the same building with the men, but it would never do to go to the police station with such scant information as that. Perhaps by the time the police would arrive, the men might be gone. If they had offices in the building, there would be more chance, but if they were merely visiting someone, what chance would there be of locating them? Imagine a policeman going

around to twenty or so offices, and asking, "Did you have three men visiting you this noon?"

"I must get some more information now that I am here," she resolved. "But I'm sure I don't know how."

She was thinking so hard that she almost bumped into a woman who was on her knees wiping the woodwork. There was a flash of inspiration, and Allie's blue eyes beamed with joy.

"Pardon me," she said, taking a half dollar out of her purse and putting it in the woman's hand, "would you mind lending me your scrub bucket for a few minutes. I want to find out about some people here."

The woman frowned, and, Allie thought, began to refuse.

"Oh, please let me," the girl pleaded. "If I'm caught or anything comes of it, I'll say I found the bucket in the hall, and there won't be any trouble for you at all."

"All right," the woman agreed. "Who did you want to find out about?"

"Those three men who just came in," Allie confided to the woman. "Do you know where they are? I must find them."

"Oh, you're talkin' about the Four Star Mining Company, I guess," the woman whispered. "I always did think there was somethin' queer about that. They come down at night and any hours."

"Where are they?" Allie demanded. "And let me have your apron."

She put her hat on a desk in a vacant office across the hall and slipped on the apron.

"They're right upstairs over us," the woman said, indicating with her finger the position directly above.

Allie, picking up the bucket of water, the brush, and the scrub cloth, dragged slowly up the steps. The bucket was only half full, and its weight would have permitted her to run up as she was accustomed to do, but caution whispered in her ear.

Just as she turned at the landing she could see through the partly opened door into the office. The sunlight was shining into the room and she could make out the form of Jackson Tobet sitting with his back to the door.

She set the bucket down quietly and sank to her knees. There was little chance of detection in the ill-lighted hall, but it was very difficult to understand their words, so low did they keep their voices.

"I must get nearer," she determined, although she did not quite know herself what advantage there would be in that.

Deliberately she picked up the brush, cloth, and bucket and reached the top of the stairs. For-

tunately the angle of the door allowed her to read the printing.

"Four Star Mining Company," was the name, and beneath, in smaller printing, was "Philip Dawson, President."

"So that's what he calls himself now," she muttered. "Of course, you can see that he's the head of it. The scoundrel!"

Nothing would be gained by remaining longer, and, too, the sooner she reached the police station, the better would be the chance of apprehending the men.

"I'll pass by once more just to see what I can see," she thought, again picking up her bucket and equipment.

Just at the moment that she was approaching the door from the side, the shadow of one of the men darkened the doorway. Its suddenness frightened her, and the bucket splashed to the floor. Bending quickly she righted it, wiping up the surplus water with her rag.

"Clean this hall some other time, will you?" growled the fellow, looking keenly at the girl.

Allie, keeping her face away from him, muttered something unintelligible and slouched toward the steps, knees trembling, heart throbbing.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALLIE MOVES QUICKLY

ALLIE DUNHAM rushed down the stairs, snatched her hat from the desk, and, leaving the curious scrubwoman gaping, flew out of the building. She must reach the police station, and she must get there quickly. Running down the street at top speed, she caused many curious eyes to stare. The blue voile dress flying in the breeze, the large violet eyes dancing with excitement, the swift pace on a street where people usually walked, all these things made people wonder. At the end of the second block, the girl saw a policeman.

"Where is Station Three?" she demanded between breaths.

She hardly waited for the man to finish his directions, but rushed on her way.

"Yes, it will be better to go to Station Three where they know about the case already," she decided. "The police sergeant will remember, and I won't have to explain everything from the beginning."

After several more blocks of running, the girl

almost collapsed. In fact, if the lamp-post had not been there for support, she would probably have sat on the curb.

"I can't go a minute more," she said to herself, "but I simply can't stop, because the men might get away."

On she went, this time at a slower pace. Hearing the purring of an engine, she turned about and saw a taxicab running not much faster than she was going.

"I must take that," she murmured, hailing the driver.

"Take me to Police Station Three," she gasped, sinking back in the cushions. She was too spent to know whether the machine was moving or standing still, and she closed her eyes in exhaustion. This was the first time that she had ever hailed a taxi, but, on thinking back, it had seemed perfectly natural. She had wanted to reach the station quickly, and all she did was to motion to the driver.

A sudden jolt forward announced that they had stopped, and Allie, seeing before her the meter, read the charge to be twenty-five cents. With a sinking feeling, she dumped the money from her purse, and found only two dimes and four pennies.

"That's all I have," she said. "I'm sorry."

She rushed up the steps of the station, two at a

time, and poured out her story to the officer in charge. The short trip in the cab had not allowed sufficient time for the girl to catch her breath. But, fortunately, the man behind the desk was the same one who had been on duty before.

"You bet we'll arrest that fellow right away," he said. "Nothing's too soon for those gold mine sharps.

"Officer Ryan," he called to a policeman, standing on the other side of the office, "take two men and go with this girl. It's the swindler case we started working on recently."

Allie, feeling very small but very important, sat in the police wagon, with its seats facing the middle. She was jolted around with each bump, but she noticed the policemen sat as comfortably as though they were in a parlor.

It was with a great deal of trouble that Allie attempted to describe their destination. But finally, in the midst of her attempt at directions and distances, one of the officers recognized the office building she told of.

"I know that place," he said. It used to be on my beat, and I remember at one time it was filled with bootleggers. That was before we cleaned it out," he added, smiling with an air of satisfaction.

In order not to arouse suspicion, the car

stopped some distance before they reached the place. Then the three officers and the girl clambered down the steps of the police wagon and walked up the stairs of the building.

When they reached the second floor, the amazed scrub woman was still in the process of tying on her apron, and looked quite impressed when she saw Allie leading the officers up the steps.

On reaching the landing between the second and third floors, Allie stood aside for the men to pass.

"They're right up there now," she whispered, pointing ahead.

Officer Ryan nodded silently.

At the top of the steps, the three policemen walked straight into the office of the Four Star Mining Company.

"You're under arrest!" Officer Ryan announced in a deep bass voice.

Jackson Tobet, still sitting at his desk, flew around in his swivel chair as though he were jerking away from an electric current. The sun gleamed on the ominous badges on the men's broad bosoms.

"What?" he exclaimed, staring at the uniforms, then at the girl.

The two confederates seated near by were

simply thunderstruck, and looked from Tobet to the policemen, and then back again.

Although the entrance of the captors was very deliberate, their astonished prisoners no doubt considered it a whirlwind, for up to the time the handcuffs were placed on Jackson Tobet, they had not caught their breath sufficiently to speak.

"What do you mean—we're under arrest?" thundered Tobet, now recovered enough to voice his protest. "There's nothing crooked about this place!" The suave tone which Allie had associated with this man had entirely disappeared. Indeed, his voice roared with such depth as a cornered lion might have used.

"Calm down—calm down, brother," the policeman said in a half tolerant tone. "You know the whole story better than we do."

Allie looked up to see if the half smile one could detect in the voice was shown on his face. She saw that it was, as though he had been accustomed to making arrests and enjoyed them.

"I want to know where your warrant is," Tobet barked angrily. "What are your grounds for arresting us?" He was in no way subdued by the sight of the policeman. He still felt himself to be master of the situation.

"You're arrested for absconding with money from Groverbury investors," Officer Ryan informed him, proceeding right along with the hand-

cuffing of the two accomplices. He was quite deliberate and took his time, much to the discomfort of the flustered men.

After the handcuffs were securely fastened, Officer Ryan began to search their pockets. Evidently he found nothing of interest on the first two, but the contents of the pockets of the third small man prompted him to utter an exclamation.

"So you're the treasurer for the bunch!" he said studying what appeared to be a small black bankbook. "Well, it's lucky for you there's this hunk of money left."

How wonderful it would be, Allie thought, if they still had the money of the people from Groverbury. The next words of the officer were an answer to her thought.

"Say, girl," he said holding the bankbook up for inspection, "this looks as though you found them in time. I think you'll get at least some of your money back, after all."

During this examination the president of the Four Star Mining Company was working himself into a greater rage.

"I don't know anything about your Groverbury story," he shouted. "My name is Philip Dawson, and as president of this firm, which is a lawful business, I refuse to be arrested." His manner was magnificent, and Allie turned to see him drawn up to his full height, his chin in the air.

"All right, clear out now," Officer Ryan said, disregarding the fellow's claim of innocence.

"I demand that you take these handcuffs off and free me and my friends," he stormed as he was pushed toward the door.

Tobet, as he passed, gave Allie a cutting glance that would have withered the girl had she been feeling less elated. But nothing mattered now. She had actually caught this swindler, and, what was better, the officer had said that they still had a bank account. This would mean, probably, that some of the money would be refunded to the creditors.

How wonderful that would be! Her father could pay Jean Malot and the landlord, and would no longer be dependent on anyone. Then, with her salary, they could easily get along until her father's wrist was thoroughly well and until he could paint again.

Her meditations were cut short by their arrival at the police station. The police sergeant at the desk smiled at the girl.

"Any time you need a job," he said, "just come around. She'd make a good detective, wouldn't she?" he said pleasantly, addressing Officer Ryan.

"Best little detective I've seen in a long time," was the answer. "And just as brave as the next one."

"We'll notify your father when to appear," the sergeant said. "His address is on file."

Allie made her way slowly up the hill to Beacon Street. Now that the excitement was over, she was thoroughly exhausted. But tightly grasped in her right hand was the notebook, the rather limited result of her day's work.

"What! are you through already?" Ralph Ronaldson said, as she entered the office of the *Household Journal*. His voice still carried the surly tone of his former grievance.

"Oh, don't worry me," Allie responded wearily. "I've done more work to-day than any five people here."

"I knew it would be too much for you," he said, thinking the girl referred to her interviews.

But Allie was in no humor to make explanations now. She would let him think anything that he chose. Meanwhile, there was the accumulation of filing to clear away.

"You do look tired, Allie," Miss McGuire said, coming over to the girl's desk. "Pale, too," she added. "I think you'd better go home for the afternoon. Walking around through the tenement district all day is tiresome even for a person who's used to it."

Carefully the girl placed her notebook in the back of her drawer.

"No mice had better chew the pages out of that

notebook," Allie ruminated, "because every bit of that interview has cleared out of my mind."

But she did not even explain to Miss McGuire the adventure in which she had partaken. She accepted the advice of the office manager and left the office.

"I do hate to go so soon," she thought, "but I'm almost dead. I'll work twice as hard tomorrow."

She walked home and fairly dragged herself up the steps. No one of the tenants would come out this time to greet her, for no one would recognize these heavy footsteps as being those of "The Girl in the Top Flat." They always associated with her a bounding, fast step.

On reaching the top she was mystified by the smell of strange tobacco which was evidently from a pipe. She wondered who the guest could be, for both Jean Malot and her father always smoked cigarettes.

As she reached her father's door she was still more bewildered, for there, seated across from her father in earnest conversation with him was a very tanned man with gray-streaked black hair. She had never seen him before.

CHAPTER XXIV

THINGS TAKE A TURN

"How did you ever get up the stairs so quietly?" asked Allie Dunham's father, surprised at her sudden appearance. Then he added: "Mr. Sunwich, this is my daughter, Allie." All the pride of a lifetime was expressed in both his voice and manner.

George Sunwich arose and shook Allie's hand heartily.

"So this is the girl I've been hearing about all afternoon," he said, smiling.

Allie admired her father's friend immediately. He had a tanned face, with tiny laughing lines about the eyes. He could look stern and serious, the girl noticed, and in a minute the laugh lines would deepen and his eyes would twinkle.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Mr. Sunwich," Allie said. "Dad has talked so much of you. But you can't guess what happened!" she exclaimed, as soon as she had acknowledged the introduction. "You can't guess!"

"Well, ever since that magazine job started,"

Mr. Dunham responded, smiling, "I've been expecting almost anything. What did hap——"

Allie could contain herself no longer.

"We got Tobet, Dad! He's in jail now!"

"Tobet!" the artist gasped. "You don't mean it!"

"Yes I do," Allie went on. "I happened to see him this noon when I was going after the interviews, and the police got him and two other fellows."

For a second the artist sat and looked at his daughter, unable to give credence to her words.

"And what's better," she continued, "we caught the treasurer of his company and when the policeman searched him they found his bankbook with a lot of money in it—in the bank I mean," she corrected.

"Why, what's all this?" Mr. Sunwich asked. "Did you lose some money, Paul?"

"Well, yes," the artist acknowledged, hesitating. "I didn't want to tell you about it. My story seems to be one misfortune after another, anyway, without adding all the frills."

In a few words he explained the situation.

"You have had a tough deal, old man," Mr. Sunwich said in a consoling tone. "But that's all over now. And when we get that wrist fixed up, you'll be a new man."

"What do you think, Allie!" her father ex-

claimed. "Mr. Sunwich wants me to go to his doctor. He's at the top of his profession, and he says I'll be fixed up in no time."

"Yes," Mr. Sunwich agreed genially. "That wrist should never have caused so much trouble. Probably it wasn't given the right care by the first doctor."

"What's more," the artist said, eager to impart to the girl all of his good news, "Mr. Sunwich has promised me commissions for several paintings. He wants me to do them as soon as my wrist is well."

"Oh, isn't that glorious!" Allie gasped, forgetting completely her weariness of a few minutes before. "But I'm going to run away now," she added. "I want to tell Mr. Malot and Miss Baldwin about it all."

"By the way, Allie," Mr. Sunwich called, as she disappeared through the door, "you're both to come to spend Labor Day with me."

"That'll be lots of fun," Allie chirped, returning. "And it's next Monday, too."

Despite the fact that Jean Malot sat before his easel, brush in hand, looking very serious, Allie burst into the room and raced over to his side.

"Now, if you're awfully busy I won't stop and tell you about it," Allie said, in a teasing tone, standing aside and looking very impressive in her blue voile dress. Ordinarily she would never have

descended on him in this fashion, but she knew that as soon as he heard the story he would forgive her.

"I heard all that commotion upstairs," he said. "Now, if you don't tell me this minute, I'm liable to paint you instead of the picture. Tell me this minute," he commanded, in a very serious tone.

Allie sat at the stool by his side and narrated the whole story from its fateful beginning in the lunch room to her final departure from the police station.

"Well, if that isn't a good piece of detective work," Jean Malot said, shaking his head. "A real sleuth couldn't have beaten it. You're a jewel, Allie, simply a jewel."

"Oh, now," Allie murmured, a soft flush coming to her cheeks.

"Yes, sir," Malot went on, "anyone who can come here practically unknown, jump right into a job on a magazine, and then catch a scoundrel who has already escaped half way across the country—well, I should say she was going some."

True to his promise, George Sunwich called for the artist the next day and took Paul Dunham to his own doctor, a leading physician of Boston.

"I don't like that swelling," the doctor said, as he skillfully manipulated the artist's arm. "How long ago was it set?"

"About the middle of the spring," the artist responded.

"Well, we'll fix that up all right," the doctor said, with a smile of confidence. It needs a little baking and some massaging. But it will take from three to six weeks, according to how fast it grows strong," he added.

Under the physician's care, Paul Dunham maintained his confidence.

"I'm sure that it's on its way to being well," he told Allie. "I never was sure when it was being treated back home that it would come out perfect again."

While the artist made his daily visits to the doctor, Allie continued with her work in the tenement section. She visited a well known settlement house, in order to secure the names and addresses of families in the neighborhood. Other parts of the South End of Boston, too, were of tremendous interest, and on these trips Allie learned a great deal of how people lived.

These crowded districts of large cities were entirely new to the girl. She could not understand how people could live in the dark, carelessly kept rooms. But her duty was to get interviews, and not to reform social conditions, so she forced herself to forget her indignation.

Sunday finally came, and with it high expectations for the morrow, for Labor Day was the date

of their invitation to the home of George Sunwich.

"Come early in the morning and stay all day," he had urged.

They stood on no formality. Shortly after nine they walked up the Esplanade and over Massachusetts Avenue to Marlborough Street. Mr. Sunwich himself opened the door for them.

After he had shown them over the house, a great part of which was furnished in antiques, they sat in the living room on the second floor.

"Now," he said, looking at Allie very solemnly, as though he were going to ask her to solve some world problem, "you will have to make the choice for us for to-day." He stopped and smiled at the girl while she wondered what she would have to choose.

"Do you mean between pickles and olives, or something?" she asked.

"No, not that," he said.

"Then what?" asked the Girl from the Top Flat.

"A choice of what we are to do to-day. We can stay here, go for a sail on the Bay, take a long auto ride, or——"

"Oh, let's take an auto ride!" cried Allie. "Can we, and visit Lexington and Concord and other historic places, and maybe Wellesley College?" she added eagerly.

"Yes, we'll make a day of it in the car and go to all those places;" and so it was arranged.

It proved a wonderful day—one Allie never forgot. And on that trip she confided to George Sunwich all her hopes of getting along in the magazine world and also her hope that they might get back some of the money sunk by her father in the oil well shares.

"You'll make good—I am sure of it—if you only stick to it," said Mr. Sunwich.

"Oh, if I only can!" breathed the girl. "And what about the oil shares—shall we get something?"

George Sunwich shook his head doubtfully.

"I can't say as to that," he answered slowly. "I don't believe those scoundrels have much left, and if it goes to the courts, the lawyers may get a large share of it."

CHAPTER XXV

BRIGHT SKIES AHEAD

After two weeks of interviewing, Allie Dunham breathed a deep sigh. Mr. Blackhurst was to return to the office that very day.

"I guess I learned an awful lot," she gasped, as she looked over her notebook of closely written notes. It was very early in the morning and she was planning to get all her filing finished before Mr. Blackhurst should come in, so that if he had a great deal of work for her to do, she would be free to do it.

Everyone seemed to arrive early that morning, even the editor himself. He came in bright and smiling with a coat of tan that was to be envied.

"My, how glad I am to be back again!" he exclaimed, as he entered the office. "I always did think that the best part of going away is the coming back again."

A series of pleasant remarks were exchanged between him and the office force. In a few minutes he spied Allie, who had been sitting at her desk, smiling, but silent.

"And here's our young author," he said in a

tone of hearty welcome. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I've had some grand adventures in the tenements," Allie replied, hoping he would interpret her grand adventures as hard work. Goodness knows it was actual, hard work!

"That's right," he responded, looking thoughtful. "You did go on that interviewing job. I had almost forgotten. Didn't get kidnapped or anything?"

"No. But I did play detective for a while one day," the girl replied.

"Oh, yes, I remember. That was the day I went away. But you let him go," he reminded her.

"Not the second time," Allie cried. "The very next day I was eating lunch in a little, greasy spoon lunch room and I saw him go out, then I——"

"Then you said: 'Here, my good man, come with me'," Mr. Blackhurst interrupted, laughing.

"No, indeed!" Allie exclaimed. "I can learn. I got the policeman to do that this time."

Mr. Blackhurst's jovial remarks, however, were only momentary, and he immediately became interested. He did not interrupt again until she had finished the whole story. Then he placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Allie," he said gravely, as they walked into his office, "while I was away I thought a great

deal about matters here at the office. I notice that you and Ronaldson don't get along; in fact, the office isn't large enough to hold both of you.

"I'm going to send Ralph out to Chicago to take charge of one of our other magazines. He'll be glad to make the change, because he's anxious to advance. When he's gone, of course, that will leave the job of assistant editorship open."

Allie had been listening wide-eyed to this recital of plans. Each sentence was a revelation, for, as usual, Mr. Blackhurst got to the heart of things without mincing matters. Again she had reached the edge of the chair.

"Now, young lady," he continued, after a moment's thought, "I'm going to make you my assistant editor. Of course," he said, as he saw the girl's look of utter amazement, "it's really only an honorary title now because you'll just start to grow into it. But here in Boston there are plenty of chances for you to grow. I'll want you to take night courses and improve yourself in that way. Then here at the office you'll be learning every day.

"It won't be any easy task, I'll warn you," he said, again looking very serious.

"But, Mr. Blackhurst, what about——" Allie began, wondering if she had understood rightly.

"Oh, you're going to ask about Miss McGuire and the other girls? They're in an entirely differ-

ent line of work. While they are busy with office matters and circulation and a hundred other things, you'll be developing into the editorial end of it and helping me get up the magazine.

"In five years," he said, his eyes twinkling, "you'll be one of the leading women editors in the magazine field. If you're not, it won't be my fault," he added.

Allie sat for a few minutes unable to speak. She took a long breath, and that seemed to revive her, but as for moving, or expressing her joy, it was simply impossible. Everything Mr. Blackhurst had said sank down into her mind and printed itself there to be remembered forever.

"My goodness," he said, taking out his watch, "I have an appointment at the Parker House in five minutes."

As he took his hat and rushed out of the office, life seemed slowly to return to the girl. But instead of a great joyousness, she experienced something of a reverent feeling, as though she had been singled out for some great prize that did not rightfully belong to her.

It was with great difficulty that Allie waited until noon. She wished to go home immediately to tell her father. She felt she must see him that very instant. Of course, the telephone was there. Jean Malot would call him downstairs if she called him that way. But that, she knew, would

never do. News such as this would burn the wires.

In some strange manner she kept herself busy until noon and then rushed home for lunch.

"You can make those steps faster than anyone I ever saw," Miss Baldwin had said some time before. But this noon she surpassed all records. She fairly flew over them. An onlooker would have testified that she took four of them at a time.

She expected her father to be sitting in his chair by the window, reading, but he was not in his room.

"Allie," he called from her own room, "where are those old oil-stock papers?"

She turned about to see him searching furiously through the box on her table containing papers.

"Why, they're right there, in the bottom," she responded, wondering at the cause for the excitement and rushing forward to assist him.

"Do you mean——" she began.

"Yes, my dear, I do mean just that!" he exclaimed, not allowing her to finish. "The police captain just called me to come over this morning. Why, those oil wells are some good, it seems, Allie."

"And shall we really get some of our money back after all?" she asked.

"Yes, Tobet and his gang offered to make restitution—at least, as much as they could. You

see, they're doing that to escape prosecution. But it's more than that! A committee of the stockholders investigated and have taken charge, and in the end we'll draw dividends from the company."

"Oh, I certainly know now what it means when I hear someone singing 'There's a rainbow round my shoulder!'" exclaimed the Girl in the Top Flat, as she flung her arms about her father and pillowed her bobbed golden head on his breast.

THE END

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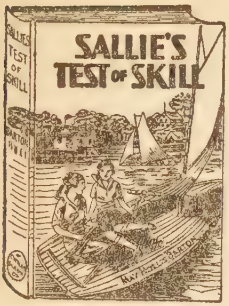

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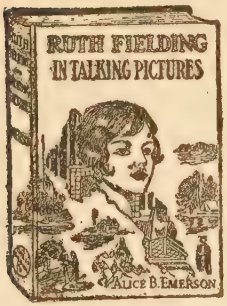

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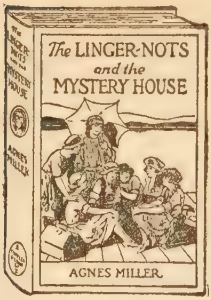

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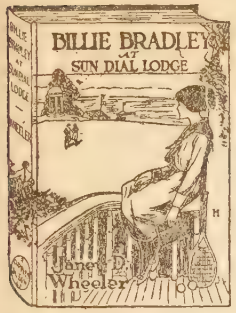

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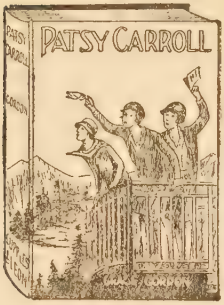

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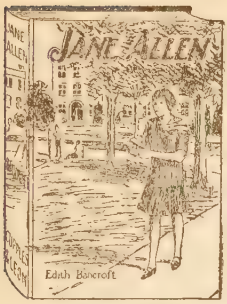

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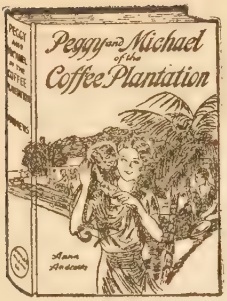

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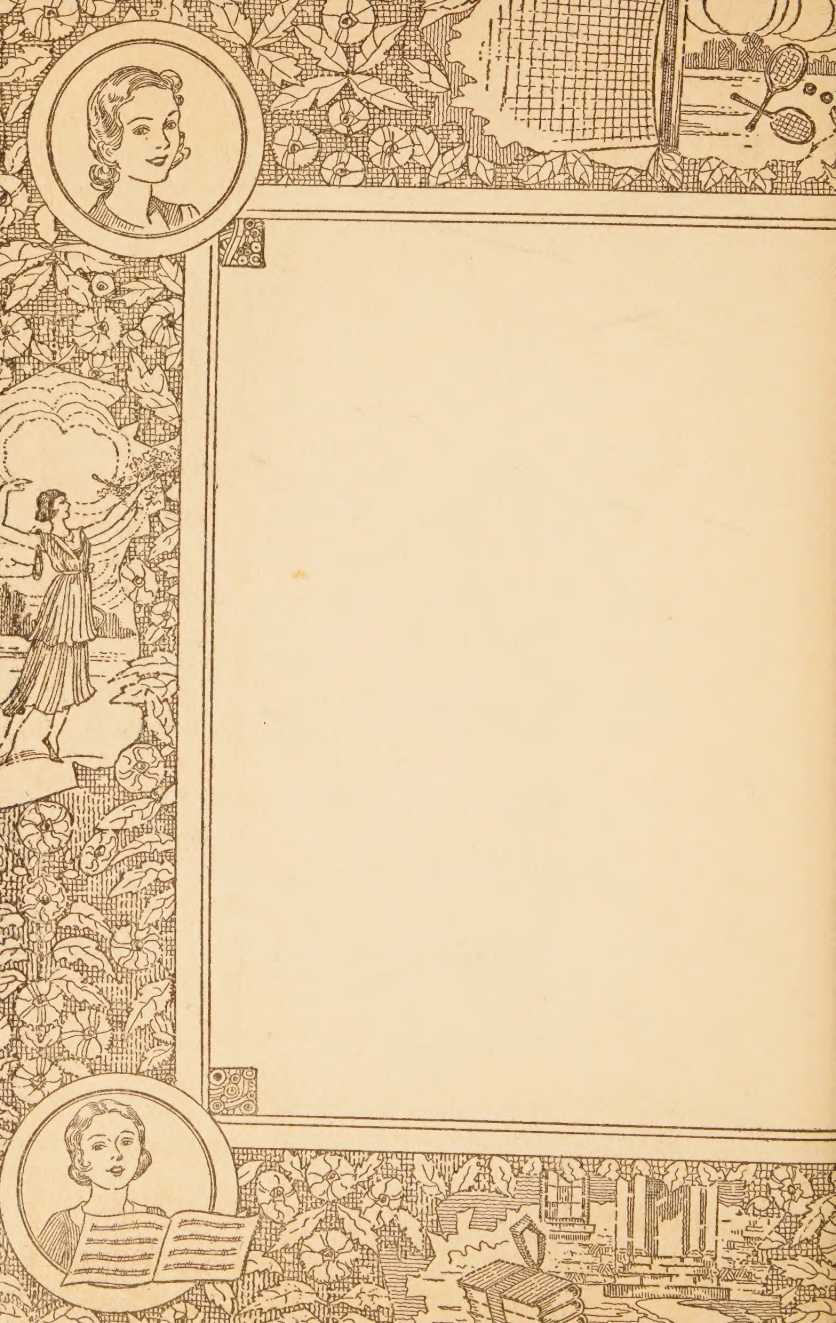

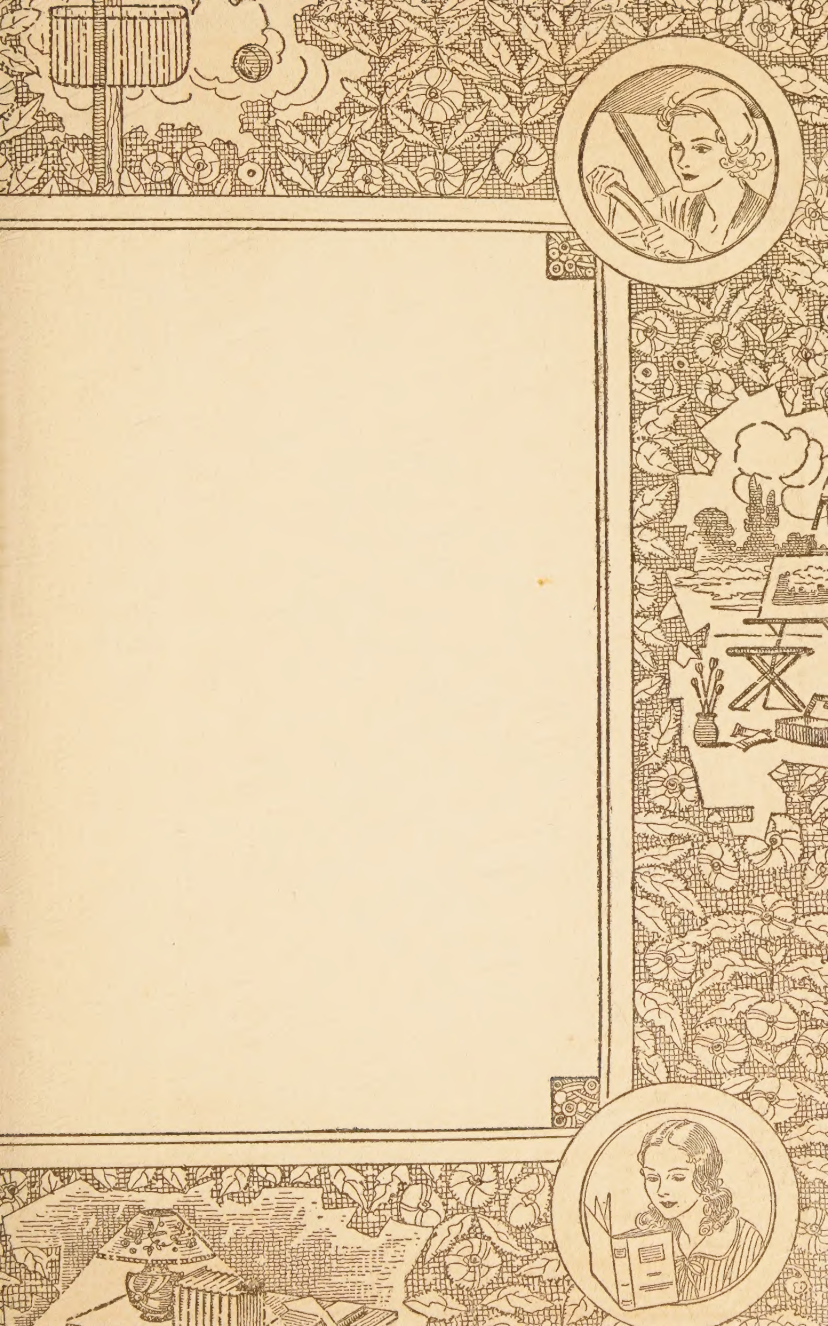

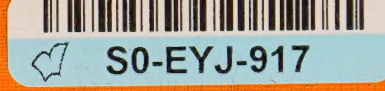
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